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The professional environment of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs.

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Abstract

The focus of this qualitative study is the professional environment where post-school transitions take place. It seeks to identify some possible means for improving outcomes for young people with low educational achievement, dyslexia, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as they move on from school. The study picks up a recommendation made by Ward and Thomson (1997), following their Scotland-wide survey, that further investigation is needed into post-school transitions of such 'unrecorded' young people. Taking ahead this task brings together different areas of knowledge, for example, inclusive education, youth transitions and social theory.

To orient the research, initial data were gathered through a questionnaire completed by 14 educational professionals and in structured interviews with 16 youngsters, mostly recently enrolled at college, and their families. Ideas occurring here were then used to inform the main data gathering process. This was conducted in 17 semi-structured audio-recorded interviews, each approximately one hour's duration, with school teachers, college lecturers and other professionals associated with transition. The methodology utilised a critical friends group to shape the research as it progressed.

The thematic analysis of the data produced information about dissimilar models of transition support, varying constructions of young people and difficulties in partnership working. The ensuing discussion considered the roles of *trusted signals of youth's value*, of *careership* based on *transformations of identity* and aspects of *social capital* on transitions of young people with additional support needs. The conclusion sets out areas for improvement and asks that greater consideration be given to the constraining factors within the professional environment of the post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs.

Introduction

The aim in this short introduction is to outline my motivation for undertaking this research study, introduce perspectives in the study, suggest its limitations, provide a brief background to the research and set out the key questions the thesis will address. A short resume of the structure of the thesis will follow.

My motivation derives from a combination of professional, academic and personal interest. The most telling inducement to look into the professional territory of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs has been my professional situation. The first period of my career I spent teaching secondary English, first in Possilpark in Glasgow and later in a Scottish rural ex-mining location where I encountered pronounced social and economic deprivation, and became strongly aware that improvement in progressions was needed, especially for less able youngsters. After having a family, I returned to work, but to a special education teaching post in a further education college, and here witnessed the effects on relationships and services of varying models of disability. Later, a cross-college management post in guidance and learning support afforded me a view, from a new perspective, of damaged learner identities of less able school leavers. During this time I participated in training events to launch and embed the findings of the Beattie Report (1999) in school and college services. I helped create the regional post-school transition form, and delivered training to school teachers, aimed at aiding information flow from school to college. I became interested in seeking improvement in partnership working to support young people with additional support needs as they left school. My recent post as a principal teacher of pupil support in a large secondary school, working closely with guidance teachers, support teachers, support assistants and partner services, afforded a rich seam for the research study to mine.

In academic terms my motivation springs from my on-going aim to educate myself in the issues surrounding special education and additional support needs, in an effort to improve my own professional practice. My growing understanding of within-child and social models of disability has supported this study. The further education college in which I worked responded to Ward and Thomson's requests for information in the mid

1990s. *Provision and Progression* (1997) identified a gap in knowledge about the transitions of young people with additional support needs, but without diagnosed medical impairments, not the subjects of a Record of Need (or Statement). Here was a group of young people whose post-school experiences required further investigation. Before embarking on the study in transitions here described, I had already undertaken a small-scale enquiry into partnership working amongst key-workers appointed by the Career Service post-Beattie. The main barrier they identified in creating partnerships was hostility to them, as a newly established semi-professional service, from established teaching professionals.

These experiences contributed to a personal dissatisfaction at being part of a service doing a less than admirable job in supporting young people leaving school. My perspective on transitions was sharpened since my own daughter with learning difficulties was approaching her transition from statutory education. The widely acknowledged anxiety surrounding transition, experienced by parents of young people with additional support needs, might be allayed for me by looking closely into this phenomenon.

To place the study in a wider perspective, the backdrop of wider social and economic conditions is relevant. Scotland has all but lost its heavy industries such as coal, steel and ship-building and its manufacturing base in textiles. The numbers employed in agriculture and fisheries have dwindled too. Unemployment, at 15% by the mid-80s, led to an increase in part time working and jobs in service industries (Brown, 1989:14-15). This economic down-turn and restructuring of the workforce impacted severely on young school leavers looking for work and apprenticeships. There has been no full recovery from this collapse of the youth labour market (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007:36), and the numbers of school leavers not in education, employment or training continues to cause concern.

Following the Beattie Report, £15 million was allocated in 2001 to support post-school transitions through National Inclusiveness Projects managed by Careers Scotland. The key-worker role was found to be of fundamental importance in success in supporting transitions, as was inter-agency working (*Research Findings* No.22/2005: Beattie Inclusiveness Projects; 2005). The seeking and respecting of the views of clients and

their families, the importance of creating an individual action plan owned by the client, and the need to boost awareness of learning needs in partner practitioners were also found to be important. The benefits of later Enhanced Resource Projects included raising the expectations and confidence of young people and improving their employability skills. However, the evaluation could show no improvement in outcome following these post-school support projects, in comparison to schools where there had been no additional intervention (Reid, Lindsay & Latimer; 2009). Further improvements and refinements in systematic identification and referral of young people at risk of negative post-school destinations, and more integrated working with senior managers and guidance teachers in schools, were called for. One broad aim of this study, therefore, is to take up this call for further enquiry and explore whether teachers and associated professionals play a part in this process of social exclusion.

The study is small-scale, enquiring into transition support in one semi-rural secondary school with 1700 pupils, and associated services in central Scotland. The data were gathered within a nine month period. No educational officer or policy maker was consulted, neither were any local employers. Co-professionals in behaviour support services had to be dropped from the study due to extended absence. The study's main participants were secondary support and guidance teachers, college lecturers, educational psychologists, careers advisers and one training provider. Young people, mainly Christmas leavers then at college, their parents and carers and pupil support teaching assistants were consulted early on. Since the research has been conducted on home territory it has sought to build dialogue and exploit the strengths of an insider study.

The perspective from which this study has been undertaken is that of a practitioner seeking improvement. Effective transition support depends to a large extent on partnership working among professionals, so this became one main focus of the study. This study aims to illuminate aspects of professional practice, enquires into the mindset of various practitioners and considers the extent to which their services are co-ordinated. The thesis will question whether the ground for inclusive post-school transitions has been sufficiently prepared. How professionals view transition, whether they share an understanding of priorities at this stage, or are driven by different agendas, is also investigated. Teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards young people, and their

preparedness to work with them to create and support career aspirations, are scrutinised. In addition, the study looks into whether teaching professionals are ready to extend their duties to undertake post-school transition support, and give signals of youths' value to young people themselves and post-school providers. Whether the effect of an introverted culture in a busy secondary school prevents a sufficiently future-oriented mindset in teachers is also considered.

The thesis seeks to address the following key questions:

- How is post-school transition support for young people with additional support needs perceived by various participants?
- What are the experiences and feelings concerning transition support of the participants from different services?
- What commonalities and contrasts in views are visible?
- How do activities and purposes interconnect, or fail to interconnect?
- What are the barriers to improvement?

Chapter One, the *Literature Review*, sets out the background of the study in terms of how issues concerning transitions have been framed in educational discourse. Views of professional activities to support transitions and aspects of social theory that can help explain some of the barriers to improvement are discussed, as are pressures within schools and wider society. The aim is to bring to light some of the more taken-for-granted factors (e.g. meritocracy in wider society, professional discretion in decision-making for young people, the attainment agenda in schools, etc.) that contribute to this area of enquiry. Cultural factors that may account to some extent for lack of improvement in post-school outcomes for young people with additional support needs are considered. The review focuses on the role of professionals and seeks to explain the provenance of the research questions devised to probe into this area. The chapter concludes with a summary of the questions, pertinent to the study, raised within the literature.

In Chapter Two, *Research Methodology*, how the research was designed and planned, and how the data were gathered and analysed are described in detail. Through careful explanation of the research processes, the 'workings' are made visible with the aim of

satisfying the reader's need to judge the process validity of the work and the contribution to knowledge offered by the thesis.

Chapter Three, *Thematic Analysis*, gives an account of the data following an inductive analysis, and draws out those themes which are most pertinent to the research questions. These are *gradual dovetailed transitions*, *perceptions of unsatisfactory transition support (dumping of young people)*, *professional attitudes towards young people*, *difficulties in partnership working* and *barriers to improvement*. Contrasting perspectives are discussed, and the key concern of the narrative is to identify potential improvements.

Chapter Four, *Discussion*, provides a more analytical discussion of the themes, aiming to contribute to knowledge of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs. Although the narrative describes difficulties, disconnections and deficits, its aim throughout is to create understanding of the means of achieving practical improvements. The discussion brings to light obstacles to inter-agency working, unhelpful constructions of young people, and a lack of systems for early intervention and action. The effect of the school's concentration on attainment, lack of support for post-school networks and teachers' failure to see themselves as key boundary people are considered. Young people's difficulties in developing self-confidence and future orientation, and the effects of the continuing harsh economic climate are also discussed.

In the *Conclusion*, the largely taken-for-granted effects of an attainment driven culture in school and meritocracy in wider society, alongside the failure of professional services to connect effectively with families who continue to bear the brunt of the harsh economic environment are discussed. How a future orientation leading to better outcomes for young people with additional support needs can be developed through better partnership working amongst professionals concludes the discussion of potential improvement.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter does not set out to be a definitive review but focuses on literature pertinent to the key questions in this study. It straddles different areas of knowledge, for example, inclusive education, youth transitions and touches on social theory, and will therefore draw on these various sources. While considering the work of authors to explain youth culture, economic and social factors, this chapter necessarily foregrounds the attitudes and understandings of teachers and co-professionals and what influences them in their work to support young people at transition. This focus aims at producing a relevant and stimulating context for this study, while engaging with broader ideas on post-school transitions. The problem of unsuccessful post-school transitions for disadvantaged young people has been well documented and policy makers have sought to make improvements over many years. The literature establishes that no significant improvement in outcomes for young people transpires at present, despite continuing policy efforts. I intend to discuss the ideas and writings that have helped shape our understanding of one factor contributing to this problem - the professional environment where post-school transitions take place.

Inclusive education exists as an important discourse in this study since its central tenet targets improvement for disadvantaged young people. It occurs within the principles of social justice and is challenged by concepts such as meritocracy, social Darwinism, weak eugenics and underclass (Gewirtz 2006, Grek et al 2009, Rose et al 1984, Sharpe & Earle 2002, Baldwin et al 1997). The discussion will show how a rights discourse encountered a barrier when set against ideas of professional discretion (Riddell 2006). The element of the inclusive education discourse central to this study is its potential for transformative influence on the professional environment and its effect in producing pragmatism in teachers and associated professionals (Mittler 2000).

Family provides a main source of support for young people as they approach and encounter the labour market, and I consider this idea alongside concepts of human and social capital. A strengths-based approach, taken from ideas of family support working, stands as a model of inclusive practice and is presented as relevant when considering professional activities by teachers and partners to support transitions. The schools' effectiveness discourse and the 'Japanization' of education will be discussed to show

how they have impacted on inclusive education and may have disadvantaged some learners. The concern is whether these are the source of time-pressure experienced by professionals and have acted to exclude pupils who do not fit the school's high-achieving profile.

Professional expectation and signals of competence and value influence young peoples' career aspirations. Pro-active demeanour in professionals in these areas will be set alongside the evidence of the over-riding effect of social and economic location and the discussion will be drawn together in a tri-part model of *careership*. This review will also discuss practical activities and processes to support transition and arguments for bringing school teachers into closer contact with employers. The aims and routes of communication between schools and post-school partners, and the value of such information-flow will be considered alongside the barriers to these activities.

Lastly, Bourdieu's social theory, in particular the concept of *habitus*, will be acknowledged as having influenced my thinking when attempting to account for obstacles to improvement in the environment of post-school transitions. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the key questions raised and a brief introduction to how they will be addressed.

Inclusive education in the research environment

The concept of inclusive education informs this study of the professional environment of post-school transition support since this ideology has acted as a main driver over the last 30 years in the effort to improve social and educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people. As well as discussing cultural barriers to inclusion, this section will provide a brief summary of the derivation and main components of the inclusive education ideology. I will draw out how the professional's role impacts on transition support. Discussion of professional discretion in decision-making processes affecting young people will be considered as countering the 'rights' discourse, and this will be explored to see how views are prioritised. The more recent policy, *Getting It Right for Every Child* (2007), has shaped approaches to transition and this will also form part of the discussion. An exploration of the professional's role, since the professional environment is the focus of my study, will contextualise the research, expose the gap between policy and implementation and offer insight into possible reasons for the

continuing lack of improvement to post-school progression for young people with additional support needs. The policy gap at post-school transition is more explicable when viewed through the lens of competing ideologies, and to that end, the controversy surrounding standards in schools and schools' effectiveness will be introduced to the discussion. Lastly, this section will locate my research, the work of a teacher-researcher, concerned to explain, and as far as possible offer insight into potential improvements to the educational and post-school support for transition of young people with additional support needs.

The idea of inclusive education has evolved as a means of bringing redress to problems of equity and engagement in what is purported to be 'universal' education in Britain. It has arisen out of concern about inequality in educational provision where young people with additional support needs have not had equal access to the educational goods of society. Secondary schools, reflecting the practices of wider society, operate as a form of meritocracy. When meritocracy, the idea that some individuals have greater merit than others, and are rewarded as a result, first took root in society it offered a welcome relief from an older order, where rights and privileges were awarded not according to a person's merit, but according to birth. An individual's placing in a meritocracy is determined by competition, and endeavour is considered a crucial aspect of this. However, innate ability and biological superiority are amongst the governing factors here, resulting in the 'goods' of society being awarded and social stratification taking place accordingly. Innate ability, as a necessary part of merit, was shown to be a component of the creed of biological determinism (Rose, Kamen & Lewontin 1984; Thomson 1998). Rose argued that those professing the creed of social Darwinism claimed that the evolutionary process is 'natural' and, therefore, the ensuing inequalities are inevitable and insurmountable. Social Darwinism copies the idea, of how the natural world changes and progresses, over to human society. From this ideology sprang the strong eugenic practices visible in the USA in the early part of the twentieth century and the weak eugenic practices still observable in medical practice in Britain, for example, the termination of impaired fetuses (Sharp & Earle; 2002:139).

Weak eugenic practices, part of the weave of our social world, are taken for granted by many and form one invisible barrier to equality. They impinge at first on those members of our society with an innate impairment, the survivors of an ante-natal cull, and then, of

course, on how the rest of us interact. They reflect and strengthen ideas of social Darwinism where those who are biologically 'fittest' rise to the top of the meritocracy and those who are 'inferior' sink to the bottom. This ideology has served to legitimise inequalities in society and accounted, to some extent, for some of the tensions discernable in discussions about the implementation of social and educational inclusion. There is pressure to exclude students who do not conform to the requirements of academic success and disrupt the target setting policies of schools (Gewirtz 2006). Since this thesis is concerned with young people who are at risk of social and economic deprivation, social justice issues, particularly ideas of distributive justice, which makes use of concepts such as marginalization and material deprivation, underpin this work. (Gewirtz 2006).

Inherent in social Darwinism is the idea that there will be those who are not suited to obtaining full measure of the goods of society and, by nature, are held back from success. In discussing this hegemony, I am suggesting that difficulties in supporting young people with additional support needs at the stage of post-school transition have their roots deep in our cultural presuppositions. The expectations and aspirations of the professionals involved in the transition process are bounded by a culture containing the limiting world view of weak eugenics and an education system based, more overtly than in England, on the principle of meritocracy (Grek, Ozga & Lawn 2009). At the same time the concept of 'valuing diversity' can also be viewed as a dangerous fiction serving to legitimise social inequalities through embracing them as valuable individual and cultural differences (Benjamin 2002). For this study, this raises the question, how does the educational culture influence the choices professionals make when attempting to implement the changes required in improving post-school transition? In particular, this thesis examines the connections between social justice issues and the attitudinal barriers of professionals towards inclusive education and successful post-school progressions.

Social stratification ordered according to the merit of individuals, and inequalities in society legitimised by biological fitness and free markets, go some way to explaining how the dominance of some groups over others has evolved in society. These ideas contribute to the concept that society creates and contains an underclass. The concept of underclass is based on a sense of an unalterable social caste which will be replicated generation on generation despite educational initiatives aimed at amelioration and

change. The term underclass replaces analysis and apports blame without recognition of the complex transitions of vulnerable youth (Baldwin, Coles & Mitchell 1997). Like social Darwinism, the idea of underclass also runs counter to the premise that an educational professional is able to enact change and improvement. Rather, teachers are seen as likely to discourage young people in their efforts to improve upon their social position. Young people who are unsuccessful at school experience a sense of loss, regret and dismay at the hands of discouraging teachers (MacDonald & Marsh 2005). They may internalise their failures as personal problems rather than see them as public issues and this may be encouraged as a way of deflecting attention away from the structural explanations (Barry 2005). Education has played a role in reinforcing disadvantage and supplying certain young people with severely damaged learner identities (Ball et al 2000). This study is concerned with whether, how and to what extent, teachers play a part in perpetuating social exclusion, through discouragement and damage to learner identities.

The provenance of inclusive education

A precursor of inclusive education, the Melville Report of 1974, brought a significant change for many families and young people with additional support needs. For the first time, all young people, regardless of ability or disability, were accorded the entitlement to education. It was no longer acceptable simply to provide care placements for those young people with disabilities. Meanwhile, The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1975) began the work of describing the social model of disability, locating the 'issue' within an inflexible society not within impaired individuals, and this was to become one of the foundation stones of inclusive education (Finkelstein 1993). The Warnock Report of 1978 progressed the move towards integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schooling, and the understanding developed that segregated remedial classes were liable to increase rather than alleviate learning difficulties. The need to restructure professional and parental relationships and attitudes in regard to post-school transition became a significant aim of inclusion in post-school services (McGinty & Fish 1992). The UNESCO Conference in Salamanca in 1994 issued a statement and framework on special needs education, and since then, the right of every young person to equal access to education has been acknowledged and adopted by 92 countries, including Britain. This historic occasion epitomised the point where special needs ideologies began to become subsumed into human rights discourses of

inclusion for all in education, and led to the recognition that children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children (UNCRPD 2006).

There has been much construction, reconstruction and refinement of the meaning of inclusive education. The most pertinent aspects of these changes in thinking are: that inclusive education is a journey not a destination, that the way that schools restructure provision is important, that parents should become more involved in transition planning and that schools should become more responsive to the diverse needs of pupils. Inclusive education has progressed from ideas of 'co-location' of pupils with additional support needs (Bailey 1998). The critique was made of the limited usefulness of 'assimilation'; a process where pupils with additional support needs were placed in the mainstream and expected to succeed without any change to the educational environment (Allan 1998). The disempowering and detrimental effect of including young people with disabilities within a bubble of support, in an unchanged mainstream, was described as 'internal exile' (Brisenden 1992). However, an essentialist view of the individual had persisted, leading to a culture of expertise and dependency in schools in which definition and decision-making by professionals also created barriers to inclusion (Barton 1998). Alongside an acceptance of the argument against disability being viewed as essentially a 'personal tragedy' (Barton 1998), a perception began to gain momentum that inclusive education was less a state than an ongoing process of transformation in schools, a journey towards improvement, not a destination (Booth & Ainscow 1998). Inclusive education required a culture shift which meant the adaptation of the school to meet diverse needs, rather than pupils fitting in to it (Lunt, Weddell & Dyson 1999). Once this understanding had been achieved, the inclusive education discourse has gone on to embrace more practical concepts of how inclusive education can be achieved through transformation of services. It is this later discourse of inclusive education which bears the most relevance to this thesis, not least because this work considers transitions of young people, in the main without inherent impairments, whose additional needs arise from societal origins. Therefore a key question for this thesis arises from this shift in understanding of inclusive education. Are the professionals, involved in supporting post-school transitions, able to adapt their services, encourage young people to flourish by helping them define their own identity and their own agenda as they prepare to move on from statutory education?

The founding aspect of inclusive education as a force for equality for learners with additional support needs carries great social significance, but it is the discourse surrounding how schools restructure and respond to diverse needs and provide choice and the opportunity for active involvement by pupils that is more pertinent to my analysis of the professional environment of post-school transitions (Sebba & Sachdev 1997: Florian 1998). In looking into ideas of choice and active involvement, a continuing dichotomy within inclusive education becomes apparent. This centres on the control of the decision-making process in individual educational planning, an area of work at the heart of my study. The Warnock Report did not endorse a 'rights' approach to inclusive education and continued to promote the principle of professional discretion (Riddell 2006). So although subsequent legislation (Education Act 1981) supported partnership with parents, it was not suggested this be pursued to the extent of challenging professional authority or professional control of the decision-making process. Parental participation in school decision making, and the participation in such processes by the young people concerned continued to be argued for (Munn 2000). This evolutionary change did not become fully established in policy in Scotland till 2004 when legislation gave prominence to parental rights to have their views heeded and set up processes for parents and carers of young people with additional support needs to pursue their educational preferences (Additional Support for Learning Act 2004). The fact that far fewer referrals to tribunals, set up under this legislation, were received than expected suggests that bureaucracy and professionalism continue to hold sway in Scotland whereas in England there is greater emphasis on legality, consumerism and managerialism (Riddell 2009).

Responsibility remains with the family

At a time when economic and labour market constraints have made the transition to adulthood increasingly more difficult, responsibility for supporting transitions has still been placed firmly with the family. Increasing economic dependence of young people upon their families, continuing until well into their mid twenties, has become more common (MacDonald & Marsh 2005). Divorce also has been found to be an important factor, since it meant that family resources were not equally available to children of first marriages and whole kinship networks could be lost to certain young people. A paucity of kinship links has been considered a contributing factor in the cycle of disadvantage

for certain families and social groups (Morrow and Richards, 1996). The family provides close and supportive relationships, where aspirations are nurtured and the seeds of future identities grown. Unsurprisingly, parents of young people with additional support needs experience anxiety as their children move beyond statutory educational provision (Ward and Thomson, 1997). As well as economic stability, the family is the main emotional support for young people at transition (Henderson et al, 2007).

Processes of socialization in childhood and adolescence are crucial influences on young people's labour market destinations (Allat, 1993). When combined with good use of social networks, the internalised parental aspirations in young people prompted greater self-confidence and this in turn led to better outcomes in post-school transitions. On the other hand, if a young person's parents are unemployed, they are cut off from information about potential job opportunities and so can not relay such advice to their children. The effect is that unemployment transfers from one generation to the next and social class differences persist (Ashton et al, 1990). School does not ensure qualifications equally across the board, in that unqualified youngsters are likely to come from families with manual work backgrounds, and these young people are more likely to become unemployed (Banks et al 1992). However, although an education system based on ideas of human capital is diametrically opposed to one based on social capital, nevertheless, it has been shown that an increase in one is likely to lead to an increase in the other (Farmakopoulou & Watson 2003). Acknowledgement of the important role the micro-system plays has led to support for the family becoming a major strategic orientation within social services, since family provide the 'bread and butter' support for young people (Dolan 2006).

Taken together, the principles of family support portray a model of inclusive practice worth bearing in mind when analysing the data in this study. The over-riding ethos of family support resides in its partnership approach, its strengths based orientation and its efforts to support existing informal networks. This reflects the central aims of *Getting it Right for Every Child* which calls for early intervention, a common language and streamlined approach amongst partners supporting young people. While the wishes, well-being and safety of children are at its heart, the aim of family support is to procure these ends with the minimum of professional intervention (Dolan 2006). This approach aims to strengthen protective factors, so that unavoidable negative factors do not exert

undue influence over the lives of young people (Gilligan 2001). In this way, self-esteem, self efficacy and competence are fostered, and through this, young people develop resilience in the face of difficulties. One of the protective factors which can help a young person as he / she approaches transition is a positive school experience. Relations with teachers are crucial to positive transitions and teachers need to be aware of this (Raffo & Reeves 2000). In resilience led approaches the professional's demeanour tends to be optimistic and pragmatic, allowing the young person to take responsibility where possible (Gilligan 2001). We will return in the findings to consider the extent to which the professional participants display this model of inclusive practice. *Getting it Right for Every Child* asks for systems, culture and language change. Therefore, considering professional activity in integrated working to support families in school and partner services is a relevant concern of this thesis. Do professionals understand the need to connect with families and their wider community in order to act effectively to support young people at transition?

The challenge of inclusive education

Inclusive education as a transformative ideology continues to challenge the existing hierarchies of status and privilege within education. There have been reasons to be concerned that this policy, which has made little of supporting the individual child, and has made much of working for changes to institutions, has not fulfilled its original potential (Riddell 2006). Teachers and co-professionals, such as educational psychologists, have continued to hold sway in day-to-day decision-making processes for individual young people with additional support needs. Arguably, those promoting inclusive education have failed to address effectively the exigencies and contingencies within which teachers and co-professionals operate. However, parents and carers, supported by public policy discourses regarding parental choice and individual rights, have exerted their authority in decisions regarding their child's educational provision. In these circumstances, teachers have seen the need to accommodate parental requests. Teachers' efforts and other educational resources have been deployed to produce support packages for young people to meet their individual needs, rather than to procure institutional or organizational change to the benefit of all, as anticipated in the inclusive education discourse (Evans & Lunt 2002). A well-intentioned parent, seeking to protect his / her child through placing them in a package of support, may not have a positive influence on the educational provision of other youngsters. Some parents are opposed

full inclusion (Farrell 2001). In response to these pressures, inclusive education has, to some extent, backfired, and strong advocacy by parents and others to produce the best support packages for individual children and young people has served to maintain the status quo (Riddell 2006). From the shortcomings of the system-focused discourse of inclusive education, the individual-focused discourse in *Getting it Right for Every Child* has grown. Do teachers and co-professionals prioritise the views of parents who make a fuss? This raises the question for this study, to what extent are teachers influenced by the advocacy of parents in respect to post-school transitions?

Schools' effectiveness discourse

Inclusive education as a discourse and policy driver has grown up amongst competing ideas and has encountered a cross-current in the co-occurring schools' effectiveness discourse. As originally conceived, the schools' effectiveness discourse, with its emphasis on how environmental factors contributed to learning, provided a welcome mode of resisting within-child and deficit models of learning difficulty (Lunt & Norwich 1999). To some extent it upheld the view that if pupils are experiencing difficulty in learning, then that is an indicator of the need to reform, and improve, schooling (Ainscow 1991). However, the debate on inclusive education has moved away from a discourse aimed to generate anti-oppressive schooling and is now located within the schools' effectiveness paradigm (Benjamin 2002). Schools' effectiveness makes use of concepts drawn from managerialism and the 'Japanization' of education. *Kaisen*, a Japanese concept of the necessity and desirability of striving for continuous improvement, is a concept at the heart of the schools' effectiveness paradigm (Morley & Rassool, 2000). This focuses solely on what is going on in school, unlike the wider interest in the school's social and economic location inherent in the inclusive education discourse. The schools' effectiveness discourse has been reluctant to include varying strategies aimed at improving achievement in lower attaining pupils, preferring to use universal benchmarks in an effort to illuminate best approaches for effective schools (Mittler 2000). School effectiveness has nothing to say on topics such as the grouping of pupils in segregated sets or bands, now commonplace, or the policies to support pupils with additional support needs. Features identified by OFSTED in 1995 as core components of effective schools, such as professional leadership, shared vision, purposeful teaching and high expectations are blandly neutral when it comes to the reorganisation of school structures and curricula (Mittler 2000). It is worth considering

whether the constant effort to improve has led to a time-pressured environment where tasks that are not considered 'core' to school improvement, for example transition support, are not prioritised?

Policy to promote standards in schools has conflicted with that of inclusive schools since one is based on market philosophy and the other on ideas of equity and altruism (Evans & Lunt 2002). Inclusiveness and effectiveness emerge from these differing ontologies and both are heavily value-laden. A method of reconciling these differences involves an acknowledgement that schools' effectiveness is not describing a simple continuum; it is multi-dimensional (Lunt & Norwich 1999). Similarly, inclusive schooling is multi-dimensional, varies from one school to another and we have no clear definition of what constitutes inclusive education (Riddell 2006). Multiple contrary values exist and the best method of resolving these in a professional environment is to find optimal balances and trade-offs; in effect, to embrace pragmatism (Mittler 2000).

Pragmatism is a key concept within this enquiry into the professional environment of post school transitions. It is a component of professional demeanour allowing for the flexibility in partnership working necessary to produce inclusion. Pragmatism also promotes authentic relationships that are key to successful interventions, where the power balance is fluid, between professionals and young people (Dolan & McGrath 2006). The effectiveness agenda within schools may have contributed to the disaffection and disengagement of less academic pupils. It may, in part, have caused the marginalisation of pupils with learning difficulties and contributed to unsuccessful post-school transitions. In this way, it has pressurised learning support teachers, who have to work around the edges of the standards agenda, making accommodation for pupils with learning difficulties (Benjamin 2002). The within-child model of learning difficulties has not disappeared simply because academics have argued it out of existence, and, at the same time, teachers' attitudes, fears, perceptions and dispositions have been shown to create major barriers to inclusive education (Mittler 2000). Whether these attitudes, tending to produce a means of excluding pupils who do not fit the academic profile of the school, have developed as a result of working within a highly pressurised and inflexible professional environment is a legitimate concern of this study.

Terminology of additional support and transition

Different authors write about additional support for learning and educational inclusion than write about youth transitions. This section brings together these two sets of ideas, or literatures, in an attempt to give a coherent picture of the background to this study. As the construction of young people with additional support for learning needs has developed, it has exposed the power differentials in the educational environment. By a similar process, the construction of school-leavers making unsuccessful transitions has undergone change. Transition support services have tended to focus on the number of young people falling into categories of service-user, rather than constructing them as individuals with aspirations (Davis 2004). In academic literature young people have been portrayed, in the main, as in need of surveillance, protection or care, occupying a position of those to be acted upon by more powerful others (Griffin, 1997).

More radical perspectives have given due regard to the life situation and experiences of the young people in question and acknowledged their activities to develop and build their futures without prescribing, proscribing or claiming superior understanding. An acknowledgement of a young person's agency at the time of post-school transition, and of the feelings of despair experienced by excluded youngsters, helps to re-balance the power differential and construct young people as more in need of support and encouragement (Griffin 1997). This construction is more likely to lead to a useful orientation in helping professionals towards young people, and to more positive outcomes for young people. This study does not set out to investigate the feelings of despair in young people, since it is concerned to uncover the professional participants' viewpoint. However, a group of school-leavers were consulted initially, and their feelings of resentment were given due regard and used to shape key questions later put to professional participants in semi-structured interviews. The construction of young people, discernable in the professionals' data, is relevant since it will help discover professional dispositions towards support for post-school transitions.

The terminology of additional support does not reflect the inequalities and oppression experienced by young people in school (Benjamin 2002). The language of special educational needs has been unequal to exposing inequalities and oppression. It has been considered a 'sugar coated poison' (Corbett 1996). The caring, tender language of special needs has been viewed as the language of compassion, yet it constructs those with learning difficulties as pitiable and, in this way, is counter-productive. Typically,

Scottish teachers refer to young people with additional support needs, but not troublesome, as ‘wee souls’, thus signalling their affection for their pupils, but making them out to be somehow less than other pupils. This type of construction denigrates ‘them’ as objects of pity, helpless and dissuades ‘us’ from supporting ‘them’ to take action on their own behalf (Oliver 1996). As a result of dissatisfaction with the vocabulary available, the term “intellectual subordination” was coined (Benjamin 2002). It conjured up the power relations and systemic inequalities experienced by these young people in school and, later, in wider society. Intellectual subordination predicts that a young person has a promised future of low-paid work, or no job at all. The idea of intellectual subordination is a helpful concept since it reminds us of the dominant social mores while signalling that extra support may be needed to make a positive progression from school, without implying that the young person is inherently impaired. This concept aptly describes the young people around whom my study has been based and the findings chapter will remain alert to this construction of young people in the professional data.

Changes in nomenclature signal changes in the discourse. Alteration in terminology for post-16 school leavers signalled changes in the construction of these young people with additional support needs. *Status zero* was used to describe young people outside the main educational pathways who, apparently, counted for nothing (Williamson 2005). Describing young people as *NEET*, Not in Education, Employment or Training, was discussed as being unacceptable at the Transitions conference in Glasgow in 2006. Since these acronyms located difficulties of inclusion within the young person, they were considered to be unhelpful labels, presenting the young person himself or herself as the problem rather than shifting the focus to the social and educational environment which had led to the potential exclusion from society at a time when they were in much need of support and encouragement. A new way of describing the policy initiative to support transition in Scotland was coined. *More Choices, More Chances*, (colloquially referred to as MC squared), included an action plan linking educational initiatives to wider social and educational strategies to improve transition outcomes for young people, thus focusing on the wider society which had produced these excluded youngsters. By a similar process, my research study aims to investigate not the young people at risk of exclusion themselves, but one of the more proximate aspects of the society which has contributed to their exclusion. By looking into the professional environment supporting

post-school transitions, I am seeking to identify the processes contributing to inclusion and exclusion. Not all teachers and associated professionals construct young people in the same way, but the question for this thesis is whether the professional participants share this broader focus and see their work as part of a web of processes supporting each individual. Or has the perception of a within-child construction of additional support needs blinded them to the wider social construction.

In theory, the implementation of inclusive education should provide the impetus to transform schools, challenging and working to improve disabling aspects of the school curriculum and replacing it with provision responsive to diverse learners' needs. By the same process, the integration of support services in schools should lead to a breaking down of professional boundaries and a more responsive system (Riddell 2006).

However, this study takes place within a context where the status and politics of inclusion, regarding transition, are fluid. Schools have been slow to respond, with teachers caught up in competing agendas and badly placed, because of exigencies and time-pressure, to respond to change and make time for improvement. This raises the question, central to this enquiry, of whether the ground for inclusive transitions has been sufficiently prepared. Teachers and associated professionals experience the future as an organizational cycle of activities revisited daily, weekly, by term and annually.

Proposals for change and improvement may founder because of a sense that, in the professionals' view, the future has already been mapped out and consists of revisiting past activities. This study will seek this attitude of mind in the professional data. The next section discusses the place of professional expectation and the recognition of competence in young people as they approach transition. The remaining sections of this chapter will place ideologies of effectiveness and inclusiveness within a more layered conception of the educational professional environment, referring to Bourdieu's idea of *habitus*. The review will conclude with a resume of the main questions raised by the literature.

The influence of professional expectation in raising aspirations in young people
Career aspirations form an integral part of career planning. Quantitative studies of young people at transition found, in common with other research, that young disabled people fare worse than their peers in school to work transitions (Furlong, 1992; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Bynner, 1998; Schoon 2001). From these findings, ideas about the

central role professionals play in the nurturing of aspirations in the lives of young people, especially those whose families are from manual work backgrounds, have been developed (Burchardt 2004). Burchardt's work discussed evidence from two quantitative studies, the British Cohort Study of 1970 and the Youth Cohort Study of 1998 and 2000, and compared aspirations for employment outcomes in disabled young people and their non-disabled peers. In a way similar to Griffin's identification of despair in young people and discussion of its consequences, Burchardt found statistically significant evidence that young disabled people are less confident, less optimistic, find themselves to be less well supported at transition than their non-disabled peers and are more likely to be unemployed (11% to 4%). These findings draw attention to the impact of aspiration in young people and the role of teacher expectations in young people's transition outcomes. Both Burchardt and Griffin demonstrated their concern that professionals, working amongst potentially excluded young people, should be aware that their actions may be 'key' to an individual young person's chances of making a successful post-school transition, and both contended that teachers need to be proactive in raising expectations. Is there evidence in the professional sphere here investigated, of pro-active disposition and awareness in teachers and associated professionals of the importance of their activity to support transitions?

Competence and recognition of competence by significant others

Self-regard and perceptions of self in young people, which in turn lead to them aiming for certain career outcomes, are influenced by the positive feedback they receive from significant others. Competence, and recognition of competence by significant others, lead to feelings of pleasure in the young person, and these feelings, in turn, lead to investment and action in this area (Henderson et al 2007). Ideas of critical and re-sequencing moments in the life course of the young person were reworked by Henderson to highlight the importance of competence in the young person's biography, or life-course choices. The effect of cultural constraints emphasised how few young people managed to break away from the norm and invent a divergent future identity. Locality was found to be significant in determining the options for young people, and therefore has significance in creating identity. These ideas of competence and situated-ness bear strong resemblance to themes of "signals of youths' value" as important components of successful transition (Rosenbaum, 1999). They amplify the previously discussed

importance of professional expectation and feedback in nurturing career aspirations in young people.

Entry into employment has been identified as a crucial factor in the shaping of adult identity as the young person aims towards independence from the family (Allat & Yeandle, 1992). Psychologists tend to view character, personality traits and transformations of identity as highly influential in career choice and in the development of 'self-concept'. Sociologists are likely to weigh the influences of gender, ethnicity and, most significantly, social class more heavily – higher social class leads to higher employment expectations. However, local labour market opportunities also affect career motivations. It is therefore essential to set this discussion of career aspirations against the view that in low paid work, opportunities do not follow skills, but rather, employment opportunities are deeply affected by local economic conditions, independent of the personal attributes, aspiration and social background of young job seekers. Educational qualifications were found to be irrelevant for entry into jobs such as cleaning, industrial operations and labouring, and the insecurity of these jobs meant that young people entering them were more likely to become unemployed regardless of educational background (Pilling 1990). In other words, exclusion may occur because of environmental and economic factors, not because of a lack of skills or aspiration in individuals. Unemployment disproportionately affects young people with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and in rural locations (Morrow and Richards 1996; Banks et al 1992).

In the face of social and economic difficulties, unalterable by any individual affected, resilient young people are likely to have a better chance of successful transition. Expectations held by others, for example, teachers, peers and parents, exert significant influence on young people (Bucharadt 2004). The impact of school teachers can be crucial and has significant effect in the developing of identity in young people. It follows that educational and career professionals need to be more proactive in developing positive career aspirations, especially in cases where parents are less well educated and less confident in dealing with professionals, since these circumstances can lead to additional barriers for young people at transition. Stereotyping of young people and under-expectation by teachers can create problems. While location has an over-riding influence on transitions, it is nevertheless clear that qualifications can make a

difference to outcomes, especially for young people with additional support needs. Supporting positive career aspirations in young people is a crucial component of positive transitions to work. Teachers and associated professionals cannot control local economic and employment factors, but they can exert influence, in support of young people's resilience, by helping them to develop positive career aspirations. Therefore this study will ask to what extent are professionals working with young people helping to create and support career aspirations?

Teacher expectations influence young people's post-school transitions and form one part of their career decision-making process. This strand of a complex process displays the limited usefulness of individualism in policy and shows the wider economic, interpersonal and cultural environment to be significant (Skeggs, 2004). *Careership* has been described as not technically rational, not made within what Giddens (1984) called discursive consciousness - that it could be verbalized and explained by the decision-maker. *Careership* is a *pragmatically rational* process of decision making, grounded in the culture and identities of the young people and bounded by *horizons for action* determined by the job and educational opportunities available and personal perceptions of what was possible, desirable and appropriate (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). *Careership* rests in part on the idea of transformation of identity, or turning points (Strauss, 1962). Choices of lifestyle within what Bourdieu described as socially and culturally derived *habitus*, where an individual's beliefs, ideas and preferences, though subjective, are inevitably shot-through with the cultural and sub-cultural traditions in which that person lives, also contributes to this model of *careership*. The third component is comprised of the young person's interactions with other players or stakeholders within the field of youth training. This tri-part model of *careership*, based on cultural identity, local opportunities and sources of help from other agencies, will provide a useful boundary within which to consider the data concerning professional understanding of transitions in this study.

Before moving on to consider post-school transition as a practical set of activities in which professionals have an ongoing role to play, I will review the discussion so far. The inclusive education project has not effected marked improvement in outcomes for young people with additional support needs, especially in the group of needy young people leaving mainstream school. Meritocracy and a market mentality have

contributed to the situation where the least well off, in terms of ability, social class and family background, continue to fare worst. Schools, by and large, have not been able to offer flexible solutions to problems their pupils face at transition, due in part to a lack of future orientation in teachers and associated professionals. The emphasis on the schools' effectiveness agenda may have been one component in creating a dearth of support for the most needy at transition.

Professional pragmatism has been shown to be useful in operating effectively in the constrained environment of schools and partner services. A willingness to overcome professional territorial barriers, understand perspectives in partner services and prepare the ground for collaborative practice make for more flexible transition support. Pragmatism also cedes power from the professional to the young person, and understands the need to promote career aspirations and help the young person develop his / her own plans. Pragmatism is an attitude of mind which, while maintaining equilibrium, far-sightedness and good partner relations, will energetically seek opportunities and pursue them, in tandem with, and in support of, young people. Pragmatic support from professionals will go a long way in developing ideas of personal competence, career aspirations and career planning in young people.

Individuation and the reflexive project of self (Giddens 1991), have not been found to contribute significantly to an understanding of the post-school progressions of disadvantaged young people (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). While choice and free will obtain, elements from the economic, geographic, class, gender and family backgrounds, out-with the control of the young person, contribute more powerfully to forming transition pathways. The main source of support to the young person, in off-setting and dealing with difficulties of cultural disadvantage, is his or her family. For these reasons, the ability of educational and associated professionals to support families, through integrated working, is an important factor in transition support. By focusing on the practical process of transition support, my aim is now to move the discussion into a consideration of the arena of action open to professionals, where they have the power to make changes to practices and effect improvement. This more dynamic discussion, focusing on practical support, and the barriers to producing it, will herald the key questions of this study.

The process of post-school transition

Rather than focusing on schools or youths, the transition process can be framed by ideas drawn from research in USA and Japan. In Japan, high schools have built long-standing relationships with local industry and directly helped students into the local labour force. Employers have come to trust teachers' judgments regarding young people's suitability for work. The system has paid off for Japanese students in the bottom half of the class whose school achievements have been positively influenced by this information exchange. Transition can be improved in this way by "school-to-work networks and trusted signals of youths' value" (Rosenbaum, 1999). One of the causes of work entry difficulties was found to be poor information about youth's productive capabilities, since employers would trust information only if it issued from a known and reliable source within the school. Youth training alone was not enough to produce effective transitions, and was only found to be effective if accompanied by trusted signals that convinced employers of the value of specific young people. A corollary of that proved to be that signals and support, giving students trusted information about how to prepare for and get a job, were also needed to keep young people engaged while at school.

By comparison, teachers in the USA did not consider themselves responsible for aiding work entry, saying it was neither their responsibility, nor the school's in general, although they knew that their students had significant needs that were going unmet (Rosenbaum, 1999). For example, teachers in his study pointed to a lack of future orientation in their students, a lack of practical knowledge of how to search for jobs and unrealistic expectations about work entry. He reported that when teachers received requests from employers to identify potential employees, they faced a choice about whether they should 'extend their duties' and take time to help students gain work, or not. Rosenbaum suggested that the basic pre-conditions for effective linkages existed. But schools in his research location did not value linkages, and those links that did exist had been created by teachers on an individual basis. He found that linkages were not part of schools' organizational aims, and teachers felt no obligation to share information and access to employer linkages with colleagues and successors. Does this culture mirror that of the research location for my study? Teachers need opportunity, encouragement and support to change the mindset, where they believe that linkage is not part of their job, to one where linkage is a valued part of their remit. Teachers, also need time to focus on, plan and carry out employer linkage activities within their working

week. Ascertaining teacher attitudes to ‘extending their duties’ and carrying out this type of transition support activity is central to this study.

Without close linkage, employers did not trust the validity and relevance of school signals, fearing that, teachers, wishing to see students do well, exaggerated their students’ accomplishment. Also, employers were inclined to see school assessments of ability as irrelevant in a work environment. Employers were likely to rely solely on interview to gather information about a young person’s demeanour, this being of more interest to them than qualifications. Similarly, young people tended to be distrustful of teachers’ messages of the relevance of efforts at school in securing good work opportunities, since many students doubted that efforts at school had a future pay-off for them (Rosenbaum 1999:250). About half of the students in Rosenbaum’s study believed there was no future penalty for them if they failed to work hard at school. This disjunction, between the aims of school and the requirements of the work environment, will be scrutinised in this study.

This discussion has raised various pointers which could helpfully influence policy direction in the future. The first was that students need schools to give them signals of their potential work value, not just their academic ability, so that they can develop good self-esteem and self-confidence about their potential as employees. This augments the previous discussion of the role of professional expectation in increasing career aspiration in young people. High schools can provide signals of youths’ value and skills, but an approach based on this idea needs to be taken forward, and ways devised for communicating information about individuals to potential employers, since employers value positive work habits more than academic ability. To what extent signals of youths’ value are created and communicated is a relevant question for this study. Teacher–employer linkages may be a good way to convey work habit information, since linkages will create trust in subjective ratings. In this way, the principle of motivating young people through policy, which heightens the importance of school, could be successful. Young people have the potential to respond if they see school as relevant to their future careers. Linkages between teachers and employers may be rare, but could be beneficial to supporting post-school transition into work. This study has sought information on linkages made by participants and on attitudes towards creating and maintaining links between schools and employers.

How communication flowed from school to post-school destinations was one major area of concern in a 30 month study conducted into the provision of post-school arrangements for a large number of young people with additional support needs in Scotland. Data was gathered from participants across 47 colleges and 5 training providers (Ward & Thomson, 1997). The research, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, formed part of an extended programme from 1988 to 1998, funded originally by the Scottish Office Education Department and latterly by the Leverhulme Trust. The Beattie Committee referred to the reports, and ideas and recommendations of Ward and Thomson can be traced in the Beattie Report of 2001. A lack of resources, evidence of prejudice and discrimination, and parental anxiety in relation to an apparent breakdown of service delivery at the post-school stage, framed research questions (Thomson & Ward: 1994). Recommendations for professional practice ensued, to ensure the consistency of information flow about individual support needs from school to post-school destinations; procedures for assuring the smooth transition of non-recorded (no statement) children with additional support needs was deemed an area needing further investigation; a greater degree of consistency in the curriculum between schools and colleges; and informal and formal networks should be extended to guarantee ongoing support for young adults (Ward & Thomson 1997:140). These recommendations have not come to fruition. In addition to these recommendations, Ward and Thomson reported that their participants had identified the following indicators of successful transition in young people with additional support needs: autonomy, assertiveness, self-advocacy skills, peer acceptance, participation in integrated work and community activities, and independent travel skills (p.66). They also noted that participants identified parental influence as a crucial factor in transitions to adulthood.

Do problems of transition relate to organizational culture in school?

One of the core concerns here is the search to explain continuing difficulties in producing improvement in post-school transitions for young people with additional support needs. The concept of *habitus* was not a starting theory for this thesis, but has arisen through views encountered in the literature showing that individuals are profoundly influenced by their place in society (e.g. Hodkinson et al 1996, Henderson et al 2007). There has been some controversy about the value of *habitus* as an organising

idea in research (Tooley & Derby 1998). However Bourdieu's theories originated as a result of extensive empirical research in classrooms and deserve due recognition. Through giving prominence to the social and cultural environment as a dynamic factor influencing an individual, the idea of *habitus* is useful in supporting arguments against deficit models, since it demonstrates the limited usefulness of conceiving problems as located solely within individuals, and focuses on the shaping elements of environmental factors. Each of us exists at the centre of a constellation of social relations, and *habitus* contributes to understanding the dynamic of this social structure in shaping our developing agency (Raffo & Reeves 2000). The most immediate layer of support, or indeed potential stress, clustered around a young person is his or her family. It is within this immediate micro-system that the young person receives feedback which aids growth and development, or not (Bronfenbrenner 1994).

The explanation of hysteresis, of how opportunities to act which are not in accordance with the organizational culture are likely to slip away, has helped to structure my understanding of what appears to be systemic inertia in the professional environment. This has led to an apparent lack of change or marked progress in post-school transitions. I have found the concept of *habitus* chiming with the perceptions of institutional torpidity gained in my role as a teacher and deepened during the data gathering process. Encountering Bourdieu's social theory in the literature has helped move me, as a researcher, from a position of frustration and vexation to one where the difficulties in the research location are more readily discernible. The concept of *habitus* has acted as a stimulant, a puzzle, and a means of contextualising the data. It has helped structure my thinking on topics such as professionals' inability to relate to young people's perspectives, or to adopt an orientation sufficiently relating to possible futures, and act in ways that are likely to promote successful, inclusive post-school transitions.

Conclusion and summary of key questions raised in this review

The key questions in this study have been framed in the light of social justice issues, in particular in terms of distributive justice concerned with the fair distribution of social and cultural resources. An over-arching question for the study is to what extent are teachers and co-professionals likely to reinforce disadvantage and perpetuate exclusion through discouragement and doing damage to learner identities in young people with additional support needs as they approach transition? Or to phrase the obverse, to what

extent are professional participants likely to adapt their services, and, working in partnership, support and encourage young people in defining and pursuing their own agenda as they prepare for and undertake post-school transition?

In considering the central role families play in supporting young people at transition and beyond, the key question here is, are parents, and the young people themselves, included in the transition processes arranged by the school and partner services? Do professionals consider there is a need to restructure relationships and connect more effectively with families in their efforts to support their young people? A subsidiary question is, are professionals more likely to prioritise support for young people whose parents will make waves if dissatisfied with the school, or are they offering an equal service to all?

In terms of school culture, does the data bear out the contention, raised in the literature, that efforts to improve schools have led to time-pressured environments where tasks that are not aimed at raising attainment are not prioritised? Do teachers hold attitudes liable to exclude young people who do not fit a 'high attainment' profile? Are there any data to support the idea that 'intellectual subordination' is a useful construction of young people with additional support needs, and one which bears out the view that power relations are inherently unfair, especially at transition, for young people with additional support needs in schools? The intention in the study is to look more carefully into professional attitudes to discover whether the data suggest that professionals are held back from proactive connections with young people's futures. The key questions for the study can be framed as, are professionals aware that their attitudes and actions, especially in raising young people's expectations, may be key to the success of post-school transitions? To what extent do professionals nurture career aspirations?

Partnership working is needed in transition support. One key question here is, to what extent do professionals see the broader focus of their work and understand their professional input as part of a web of support at transition for young people with additional support needs? Or, is the within-child model of additional support needs continuing to shape transition support arrangements? These two questions lead to subsequent enquiries as to whether the grounds between school and post-school partners have been sufficiently prepared for inclusive transitions to take place? Do teachers see

linkage with partners as part of their job? What are their attitudes towards extending their duties to do this transition support work? Are teachers being offered support and encouragement themselves to extend their duties in this way? Is information about additional support needs flowing effectively from school to post-school partners? Also, is there any evidence of the dovetailing of ideas between school and post-school services, or is a disjunction visible?

Chapter Two - Research Methodology

Introduction

A major task of qualitative researchers is to manage the subjectivity of their work. An important purpose of the written study is to account for how this is done . . . through showing the workings of the research (Holliday; 2002)

While describing and making a case for the methods, this chapter will identify the strengths and weaknesses of this professionally situated approach, where the researcher was a working member of the environment being researched. The methodological approach has been fluid since my understanding of methods has advanced as the research has accumulated. The situation of this study, within the site of my working practice, has had its benefits and its drawbacks. I have been part of the research environment and have had direct access to participants, a shared knowledge of the field and am already alert to some of the potential participants' perspectives. Therefore, this study does not offer neutral observation, but is "historically situated" and offers a partial view of the topic (Denzin & Lincoln 2002). The professional grounding has meant that the potential participants have been approached because they were school and associated colleagues. Some teachers did not participate, although they had several opportunities to opt in. In fact, one participant ignored phase one, but participated in phase two. Were they too busy, not interested or hostile? Did they consider participation in the research to be counter-cultural and exercise their internalised self-discipline to avoid participation (Danaher Schirato & Webb 2000)? I did not divert to answer these questions, but persisted, with willing participants, to look into the main focus of the study.

Through discussing methodological issues alongside the explanation of the practical procedures I undertook, I will be 'showing my workings' to an extent that helps to substantiate the 'validation' through principles of reflexivity and workability – the ability of this study to inform professional practice (Heikkinen, Huttenen & Syrjala 2007). Systematically setting out the details of the research process will help vouch for the reliability and validity, the 'trustworthiness' of the findings (BERA 2001). While discussing the limitations of the single site study as a research approach, I will show

how I attempted to strengthen the method and achieve validity through the concept of exemplary knowledge. The ethical choices made will be highlighted throughout and accounting for self is a mainstay in this discussion.

The research design developed as a result of three intertwined strands. First, the circumstances within which the research took place strongly influenced the methods used. As is the case with all research, the data gathering was contingent on activities within the research location. The busy-ness of the secondary school environment led to constraints in participation and required reviewing and updating data collection agreements. Secondly, I took decisions at various points, to choose one method instead of another, and through explaining the purposes, the 'workings' should be visible. Thirdly, the critical friends of this study and, later, the participants have shaped the research design and contributed to its reflexivity. Their contributions were included in an effort to ensure the responsive nature of the research and its relevance to its participants. The critical friends group acted also to strengthen validity through providing wider reflection on the ideas the study generated.

The methodology has been fluid since my understanding of the research process has altered during the course of the study. At the outset of the project, I was of the view that researchers are reformers of a sort, and once they expose the underlying framework of social organization, then structures can be changed and meanings altered by goodwill and determination on the part of the participants. This early approach resembled what has been described as voluntarism (Soder 1989). During the course of reading for the study, ideas of social organization, in particular *habitus*, as discussed in the previous chapter, exposed a level of complexity in organizations, visible as a type of inertia or torpidity (Bourdieu 1990). However, as I gained this understanding after the main data gathering was completed, it has not been possible to utilise this concept fully as an analytic tool, but it has helped develop my understanding of some of the limitations of this and other research projects. The overarching aim of the study has been to identify how to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young people at post-school transition, and in this way, serve the purposes of the community (Denzin and Lincoln 2002). I have undertaken it in the spirit of 'complex hope', an optimism which recognises the

historical and structural difficulties which influence outcomes (Thrupp & Tomlinson 2005).

The presentation, to Ed D students and staff colleagues, of the outline planned approach to this research study prompted a debate about what was the most useful focus for the research; should I give voice to the young people themselves and their families, and prioritise the views of those who are traditionally likely not to be heard, or should I engage principally with those professionals who support post-school transitions? Those arguing for giving voice to young people at transition made the case that access to authentic and reliable data from young people is invaluable and empowering to the participants and their community. I was in a good position to achieve a snapshot of the concerns of disadvantaged young people, and make their voices heard, as others had usefully recorded previously (Gow & McPherson 1980). I understood consultation with young people, to gain their perspective, could help to understand practices within schools (Flutter & Ruddock 2004). Similarly, positioning young people as full and active participants in the study would help create a more inclusive methodology, empowering the young participants, and understanding them to be actors on their own behalf is consistent with a constructivist epistemology being deployed here (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr 2000).

However, although the young people and their families can demonstrate the micro-politics of their experiences, and, conversely, the policy makers can seek to direct changes and make improvements in the macro-politics of post-school transition, the stratum I was most interested in was the professional environment. The people with the power to implement the changes, the lynch-pins in the process, are the professionals tasked to do the work. 'Street-level bureaucrats' will decide how and to what extent policies are implemented (Lipsky 1980). Those arguing for prioritising the professional voice, in the presentation of the thesis plan, had posited that an action research project into this professional dimension of post-school transitions would, taking a longer view, have the best chance of helping the young people and their families. So, I have concentrated on investigating the professional view, but the study has also aimed to acknowledge and make use of the young person's and his or her family's voices. By

maintaining some diversity of perspective, I aimed to strengthen the participative nature of this research approach. This participative approach has been adopted to support change and improvement in the area of investigation (McNiff & Whitehead 2002). The object of the study is through inquiry into the social practice around transitions and the values, meanings and commitments of those involved, to develop a better understanding of how to implement improvements (Carr & Kemmis 1993).

In a small scale study, not using a 'control' or wide sampling, it may not be possible to tell to what extent researcher perceptions have affected the conclusions reached (Nisbet & Watt 1984). To avoid what has been considered by McIntyre and others, to be a weak social science method (Yin 2003), I looked around for a means to strengthen the approach. Grounded theory was attractive to me since its continuous interplay between analysis and data collection, and the seeking of multiple perspectives, seemed to offer greater validity than an ungrounded approach (Strauss & Corbin 1994:279). It was in the light of this method that I took early data from young people participants and others, through the use of questionnaires and structured telephone interviews [appendix 1a, 3 & 4], and fed the resultant topics back into the main study via key questions in the semi-structured interview schedule. Interview participants, the professionals, were given data that had been drawn out of the research, rather than ideas out of my head or directly from the literature, to consider and respond to. It strengthened the research objectives by following the approach of Paulo Freire, who would place information about 'the here and now' before participants in as neutral a way as possible (Kirkwood & Kirkwood 1989). This open approach, where the direction of the research could be guided by the participants, allowed for the research participants to be the subjects, rather than objects, of the research and opened up the possibility that participants would respond with greater interest and authenticity as they began to see possibilities for action on their own behalf.

I did not, however, persist with a grounded approach, since I was not in the position to feed data back in to the study repeatedly, but adopted a local pragmatic rationale for the conceptual approach taken (Seidman 1991:504). The aim of the research was not to generate theory, the study being too small-scale for such an aim, but to offer information

from close observation. Similarly I was wary that there could be any generalised knowledge produced as a result of this work, since the results would be context dependent (Flyvberg 2006). While providing a helpful entry to the research process, and, crucially, giving me confidence as a researcher, it became clear that the superimposition of a grounded theory methodology in a small-scale one-off study would become unwieldy. The pursuit of such a method might interfere with a simple form of sense-making and overshadow the direct validity of participants' accounts (Thomas & James 2006). So, after the initial stage of data gathering, analysis and feeding back into the design, I continued in creating a 'down-to-earth study, strong in reality' that would be easily understood and evaluated by readers and colleagues (Aldeman, Jenkins & Kemmis 1984).

Creating theory, or knowledge that can be applied generally across diverse situations, was not an aim in this small-scale case study. However, it was necessary to look into the extent of the validity of the adopted approach. The internal validity of the study can be appraised when considering whether the research deals with what it has set out to examine (Locke, Silverman & Spiro 1998:117). But would the work be useful to others? I began to look at the validation of the study in the light of phronesis; practical reasoning and discernment (Noel 1999). Phronesis was relevant here since I, as researcher, was also a practitioner in the educational environment under investigation. The judgments I made, ensuing from the data, were made in an effort to see and do the right thing in the circumstances (Carr & Kemmis 1986). The aim was that this study would provide a type of exemplary knowledge that was both corrigible and interpretable in the context of phronesis (Thomas 2011). The validation of this study rested on its collaborative structure, a type of *democratic validity*, and the process of reflective cycles it underwent produced a *process validity* (Anderson & Kerr 1999). Presentation of findings to critical friends and reflection on their views aided this approach. Validation would gain strength, potentially, in the reader's mind through a process of noticing links between themes and ideas in the data, and how insights of value to the main aims of the study have been elicited. The effectiveness of this process of validation depends on clarity in managing subjectivity in the researcher, accounting for 'self' and creating a critical text with space for multiple voices to speak (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:509).

Therefore, the task has been to build up a picture and expose the difficulties in the research through honesty and self-knowledge.

Research Questions

The research questions were devised to illuminate factors in the research field that, taken together, could help explain difficulties in supporting transitions. My aim was first to understand the pressures at work in the professional environment and how they impacted on transitions. This search for understanding and explanation was driven by my own professional concern that transition support for young people with additional support needs was often not very well handled nor led to successful outcomes, and improvement was needed. The first research question enquired into perceptions of the process:

- How is post-school transition support for young people with additional support needs perceived by various participants?

My aim was to elicit information on any differences in view, disputed ideas or controversies between services, as a first step towards identifying potential areas for improvement. In enquiring into the professional dimension, I was seeking to probe beneath the surface of activities undertaken, into the reactions of those tasked to do the work. The second question sought to enquire further into any experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the transition support process:

- What are the experiences and feelings concerning transition support of the participants from different services?

In the process of considering reactions by professionals to their work in this area, the third question presented itself as a natural next step in an attempt to draw together and compare any differences in views:

- What commonalities and contrasts in views are visible?

Answers to these three questions would help create the foundation for understanding how transition support was framed by various professional participants and give a view of their experiences of any pressures in partnership working entailed in transition support. The fourth question aimed to tease out these ideas of comparisons and contrasts between members of different professional groups and to look more closely at the practical implications for partnership working:

- How do activities and purposes interconnect, or fail to interconnect?

The ability to work in partnership, in an interconnecting way, with professionals from other services would impact on the success or otherwise of a joined-up approach to transition support. Finally, the fifth question sought to identify obstacles to be overcome, and begin the work of accounting for the lack of any real improvement so far:

- What are the barriers to improvement?

Seeking to discover the difficulties, the pitfalls on the path to improvement, confirmed that this study has a practical aim and an intention to improve professional practice. In identifying difficulties experienced by the participants, the way to improvement should become simpler to discern.

Outline of the Research Design

This brief outline provides insight into my approach to the data gathering and includes two tables showing the data gathering procedures. The design needed to be useable in a secondary school environment and its surrounding services and, as an insider I had to be careful to avoid creating difficulties I would later have to live with. Many post-school transition planning activities take place in pupil-centred meetings, and best practice in these meetings requires the minimum number of professionals; those attending should ideally be there by invitation from the young person. An additional observer/researcher might intimidate pupils and parents alike. Observation could therefore have had a detrimental effect on the planning activities and so, on ethical grounds, in an effort to 'do no harm' I dispensed with observation as a primary research method in this study. It is also worth noting that using observation as a method would have been unlikely to have been acceptable to colleagues, the participants in the study. It might have been constructed as a way of me, as principal teacher, snooping into how they conducted review and planning meetings. Therefore, I decided to make use of semi-structured interviews as the main data-gathering instrument. I fashioned five key questions taken in part from ideas in the literature, and redrafted following input from critical friends and in consideration of on-going professional concerns. This research instrument gave an element of coherence in the data, but allowed for participants to have a good deal of influence on the direction of the discussions.

Semi-structured interviews would allow me to investigate the views and opinions of professional colleagues, shaping the environment where transition takes place, without coming into their professional territory in ‘real time’. I would be able to probe beyond surface responses, and begin to construct an understanding of the transition process in dialogue with participants. A detailed discussion of how this research instrument was devised will be given later in ‘*how the semi-structured interview schedule for staff was developed*’ section. The first task was to prepare the ground, in terms of research relationship and the development of ideas, before proceeding to the main data gathering in professional interviews; to use data collection methods that worked well together (Drever 2003). In phase one, I created and administered a questionnaire for teachers and associated professionals and conducted short structured interviews with young people, parents and carers to create a broad but superficial picture. This data generated the ideas I then looked into in greater depth in the semi-structured interviews with professionals in phase two.

Data Gathering Procedures

Phase One (3 months)

Participant	Data collection method	Number
School staff	Questionnaire [appendix 1]	6 teachers 8 Pupil Support Assistants
Young person	Structured interview [appendix 3]	13 Xmas leavers at college 3 S5 school low achievers
Parent / carer	Structured phone interview [appendix 4]	11
<i>Feedback</i>	<i>to critical</i>	<i>friends [appendix 6]</i>

In Phase One, 8 teachers who were approached did not respond. All the pupil support assistants responded. One college student did not respond. Group interviews were most productive of data with young people. Parents and carers were responsive and willing to talk about their child, but not responsive to the general question about improvements. The data generated here informed the interview schedule in Phase Two.

Data Gathering Procedures

Phase Two (6 months)

Participant	Data collection method	Number
School staff	Semi-structured interviews [appendix 8]	4 Pupil Support Teachers 2 Guidance Teachers 1 Flex Curric Co-ordinator
Careers Adviser	Semi-structured group interview	1 interview, 2 participants
<i>Feedback</i>	<i>to critical</i>	<i>friends</i> [appendix 7]
College staff	Semi-structured interviews	5 College Lecturers 2 College Transition Co-ordinators
Ed Psychologist	Semi-structured group interview	1 interview, 2 participants
Training Provider	Semi-structured interview	1
<i>Feedback</i>	<i>to critical</i>	<i>friends</i> [appendix 9]

In Phase Two, 2 school guidance teachers who had ignored Phase One opted in. All college staff approached participated willingly. The lecturers were from Care, Hospitality, Construction, Engineering and Special Programmes. The Careers Advisers and the Educational Psychologists preferred to be interviewed with their co-worker. Feedback to critical friends took place at two stages; following data gathering with school teachers and later following data gathering with professional college participants.

Access to school participants

General access to the school community of pupils and their records, parents and teachers was readily obtained from the head teacher of the school. He was very supportive of the research into post-school transitions since he too wanted to improve the poor transitions of young people with additional support needs leaving the school. He was also keen to promote a self-reflexive research community within the school to support school improvement. At the outset and at the surface level of agreement from senior staff in school, therefore, I had full access to the school. However, the work was not part of a

larger research project, nor was I tasked directly by my employer to do the work, so there was no requirement that any co-professional should participate.

Access in practice, not in theory, however, consumes time and energy. Professionals working in secondary education and associated services, where large numbers of interactions with young people take place each day, have very busy schedules and workloads pose common problems of stress for them. One aim therefore was to seek to interact with the professional participants with the minimum disruption and with the least possible additional workload for them, while offering them a useful vehicle for self-reflection. The research design was therefore produced as a means of drawing in colleagues, of engaging them in considering the research issues and of preparing the ground by offering explanation so that potential participants became interested and willing to get involved. In this way I secured the 'bottom up' access agreement that is equally important to successful research (Silverman 2000). There had been hostility within the school to the recently re-structured Pupil Support Service and the creation of the Principal Teacher Pupil Support post. The Pupil Support Plan had not been agreed by the staff of the school, so, as well as gathering data, the early instruments were designed to begin to overcome these barriers, prepare the ground and encourage professional dialogue about post-school transitions. In this unsettled environment, the method of handling initial interactions with potential participants would be critical in establishing trust and rapport (Janesick 1994).

Engaging co-professionals at school

Failure to prepare the ground effectively could lead to a souring of relations and the research being unproductive (Todhunter 2003). The engagement of co-professionals in creating the research, as well as acting as its participants, is visible in two early strands of the methodology; drawing together a critical friends group in school and using a questionnaire in phase one of the research. Two teachers, one from learning support, one from behaviour support, and a third participant, the flexible curriculum coordinator, had showed interest in the work, and they formed the nucleus of a critical friends group in school. As a means of involving a wider group of colleagues easily, I created a questionnaire [appendix 1], which would take about 20 minutes to complete. The

primary aim here was to give a clear indication to participants of the themes in the research, but also to generate a manageable amount of data to feed back into the research. I discussed confidentiality and anonymity issues with the critical friends, emailed the blank questionnaire form to all teachers working in pupil support, guidance and depute head teachers. I requested they complete the questionnaire on screen, this to avoid me recognising handwriting, print out their responses and mail back to me in the stamped addressed envelope I provided. In the event, the 6 teachers who responded made no effort at all to remain anonymous and the remaining 8, despite being offered anonymity, did not participate.

I then approached the pupil support assistants to get detailed data from a slightly different perspective. Their work environment meant that pupil support assistants developed close, supportive relationships with young people and frequently acted as their advocates. They were semi-professionals, towards the bottom of the school hierarchy, but worked most closely with young people with, for example, challenging behaviour. Being placed at the base of a hierarchy, pupil support assistants can be disaffected from the organizational culture of the school (Turner 1988). It was important to me professionally to avoid disaffecting them as a group. I was aiming to cement good relations and respectful attitudes with staff across the whole school pupil support team. All 8, who worked with pupils approaching transition in S3 and S4, responded.

Access to young people at college, college lecturers, careers advisers and educational psychologists

During this first phase of the research I approached Central College to begin data gathering amongst a small group of students there. From earlier studies in Special Education I knew the Depute Principal and this acquaintance smoothed the way for access to college students which was readily agreed. The potential participants were Beechbank High School Christmas leavers who had enrolled on college courses in *hospitality, care, engineering* and *construction*. Since they were below 16 years in age, they continued on the school roll, but had chosen to go to college rather than return to school for a fifth year. This group of young people was known to comprise low

achievers at school, hence their desire, and encouragement to leave school at the earliest opportunity, but they were not chosen as participants due to inherent disability or learning difficulty. It is relevant, however, that the data they provided showed that 9 of the 13 had received additional support at school for dyslexia, visual impairment, medical impairment, or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties arising from family problems. In addition, a further 2 expressed some dissatisfaction about their treatment at school. College had assessed their learning needs and found them to be dyslexic and they were, by then, receiving extra support for literacy which had not been provided at school. So, although not chosen because of their additional support needs, the majority were young people with additional support needs.

Each student participant received an information and consent form, in bullet point format, printed on yellow to help those with reading and visual difficulties [Appendix 2]. It clarified the limits of the confidentiality I was offering; any disclosed information, suggesting a young person was at risk, would be acted upon. I offered explanations and further information about the research, and pointed out how participants could get back in touch with me for de-briefing after the interview. All participants gave informed consent and signed the tear-off slip. The students were asked to pass the remainder of the information sheet to their parent / carer. All but 2 participants agreed to me contacting their family.

The request to the senior Careers Scotland manager for access to local careers advisers was speedily granted, also without any concerns raised. I devised questionnaires, following the same outline as for teachers and early correspondence and face-to-face meetings allowed the research topic to be aired. The careers advisers wanted to find out the purpose of the research, who else would participate and how and where the results would be distributed. These questions were asked and answered, and anonymity and confidentiality assured, mainly through fictionalising of names, before the data collection proper began. The careers advisers preferred to meet in a group, and this interview arrangement produced a more discursive type of data, where participants jointly searched for explanations. As is the case with group interviews, the dynamic of the shared experience influenced some aspects of frankness within the discussion

(Barbour 1999). This interview, however, produced a very interesting and productive strand within the data gathered.

Access to educational psychologists, education officers, off-campus behaviour support teachers and senior education managers proved more problematic. My request for access to partner educational services went unanswered [appendix 5]. On phoning, I heard that the local area education manager had refused the request for access to the school “in line with best research practice”. This was interesting and potentially presented a major barrier to the study. It caused me some anxiety. In the event, the head teacher at Beechbank cleared up the difficulty by explaining to the local area education officer that he had already agreed access to the school and research was already underway. A subsequent request for access, made, ingenuously, to a senior education manager from another area, whose remit encompassed behaviour support services and psychological services, was agreed. The two educational psychologists attached to the school, like the careers advisers, preferred a small group interview and sought the same reassurances about the research. The principal teacher of the off-campus behaviour support service was on extended medical leave, and so data gathering did not take place there.

How the critical friends group affected the research design

Preparing the ground, removing the barriers to research, embedding it within the professional practice in the locale and bolstering validity through additional opportunities for reflexivity through group dialogue (Bolton 2010) were the main reasons for the decision to create a critical friends group. As the data gathering got under way, I occupied a usually empty space, acting as a link between former pupils, school teachers and partner services. As I explain the actions I took here, my ethical approach should become visible. Confidentiality and respect for individuals were necessary, yet I wanted to provide useful insight and information generated by the research for participants. I fed back ‘snapshots’ to critical friends of how their ex-pupils were doing at college, and passed messages between ex-pupils and teachers. For example, one ex-pupil said she was grateful to a particular staff member for the lift she’d been given down to college for her initial interview. If she hadn’t had the lift, she would

not have gone to college. These positive messages helped demystify the role of the researcher, and showed the research to be about day-to-day interactions between people.

I also acted as a go-between for school staff and careers advisers by asking careers advisers about the non-college destinations of some school-leavers with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and feeding this information back to school staff. This was a more contentious subject for communication. The flexible curriculum coordinator who posed the question was frustrated that some ex-pupils seemed to have fallen through the Career Service net. The process of providing a communication link between school and partner services helped to confirm for participants that the research was concerned with day-to-day relationships and outcomes for individual participants. This identified me as a researcher, but also highlighted the fact that I had a continuing professional interest in the well-being of the young people in question.

Three months into the research project, I reported back to a lunchtime critical friends meeting [appendix 6]. Two main topics arose; the place of the views and opinions of young people, and suitable methods of gleaning the best data in interviews with teachers. Listening to young people was considered crucial by the group since it served to anchor the research to the experiences and aspirations of the young people at its heart. The second topic concerned ways to engage teachers with what the critical friend called a 'Gregg's Bakery' approach to data gathering in interviews. The 'anything else?' question, posed towards the end of the interview, would cause the agenda to flow away from the researcher and so allow data to appear that might otherwise have remained unspoken. Here was some evidence that the data gathering approach adopted, giving participants the opportunity to mould and direct the research, was considered suitable by critical friends.

At the second critical friends meeting, three months later, the discussion elicited the frustration teachers felt at the clash of policies at 'street-level' [appendix 7]. The group considered the time-consuming pupil-centred approach required to engender personal career goals and motivation in young people. At the same time, the discussion considered that raising attainment continued as the principal aim of the school. A

simmering discontent grew within the meeting while these agendas were discussed and found to be clashing. The role of key-worker became the subject of disagreement in the group. This issue offered a further chance for reflection on the aim, central to effective transition support, to enhance partnership working with external agencies. If teachers had difficulty working together in school to determine who does what to support transition, what chance do schools have in offering partnership working to external agencies? The meeting became pressurised and negative and the critical friends began to display disaffection from the discussion. Though providing a useful perspective on professional views of the difficulties surrounding transition, a lunchtime meeting, where disagreements arose, might have the effect of putting participants off. I decided to hold the third and final critical friends meeting, to discuss college data, at the end of the school day.

The third critical friends' meeting was held at the end of the school day over coffee and cake. The atmosphere remained engaged throughout as I presented emergent themes from the data gleaned at college [appendix 9]. The discussion involved concern that college opportunities were not "meshed in" with the school timetable and that better communication with college personnel, possibly on in-service days, was needed. This meeting progressed in a positive way throughout with critical friends picking up themes from the college perspective and using them to help them devise ways of improving their own practice. In this way the critical friends group aided the research study and at the same time offered an opportunity for critical reflection in school staff.

Phase One

Development of the questionnaire

With the help of three external critical friends, who were a senior educational psychologist, an education support officer, with a remit to disseminate information about the Additional Support for Learning Act (2004), and a lecturer in community education, the questionnaire [appendix 1] went through five drafts in a process of crafting the most useful questions (Munn & Drever 2004). The question topics were identification of additional support needs (drawn from ideas in the literature about the changing constructions of additional support needs), planning for transition and self-advocacy,

activities to support transition, partnership working and questions seeking proposals for improvement (drawn from my knowledge of professional practice to support transitions). The responses to the scaled questions at the beginning gave an indication of participants' attitudes. The later tables indicated the level of each activity to support transition and engage in partnership working. The final three open questions invited participants to record their views on improvements they would like to see, giving a space for new angles or issues to emerge and allowing the research to be directed by the participants.

The first five questions on identification of additional support needs were concerned to prompt critical reflection in respondents and investigate opinions about inclusiveness and equity at the transition stage. Participants were asked to consider gaps in practice, difficulties and hidden disabilities as well as surface level activity. The two questions on post-school planning probed into the participants' knowledge of the young people under their care and their readiness to advocate for them. The questions were also designed to test whether there was a feedback loop regarding pupil destinations. The question on transition support activities aimed to set out a nuanced and thought-provoking taxonomy of support activities and prompted respondents to distinguish the more valuable activities. The question on inter-agency working, a concept integral to effective transition support, required respondents to reflect critically on their own communication activities. The last three questions allowed the respondents the opportunity to influence the direction of the research, albeit within the concept of improving practice.

The questions went through a process of revision, the details of which, given here, will portray the rationale behind the research, the direction it was taking. This discussion will further my aim to 'show my workings'. The initial question format was 'either/or', with the participant asked to choose the statement which best reflected their view. This closed format caused a strong negative reaction in one of the critical friends. The wording of the question was also criticised. The first question originally included the phrase, 'used to categorise young people'. Incorporating this challenging terminology and suggesting colleagues were in the business of categorising young people, rather than their needs, proved counter-productive. Even if this critical friend reacted negatively

because he was, indeed, in the business of categorising young people, a direct question on this would be unlikely to elicit honest data. Unwittingly I had distanced a critical friend from the research rather than opening up ideas about additional support needs as was intended. As well as refocusing and rewording the question, I used scaled questions thereafter, with five choices to include a neutral choice. This went against accepted practice in school evaluation where only four categories are given, forcing positive or negative responses with no fence-sitting. However, since the main aim of the questionnaire was to involve participants and open up topics for consideration, I determined that fence-sitting was not detrimental to these aims. After each question I gave space for comment, again giving respondents more freedom of expression and thus moved the questionnaire to a more open format.

The re-drafted first question was on the use of the term ‘additional support needs’ and was originally framed to look into how professionals are adapting to policy makers’ changing views of support needs. I wanted to find out how professionals were responding to the policy as it continued its move away from the medical model which had produced the term ‘special educational needs’, towards a social model apparent in the term ‘additional support needs’. I had hoped to build into the questionnaire a means of eliciting views on how categories of need are defined, indeed how and why pupils are categorised. This proved too complex and contested for enquiry by means of a questionnaire. The aim was to bring colleagues ‘on board’, not disaffect them, so I simply asked if they had a sound understanding of the term ‘additional support needs’, and hoped that respondents would flesh out their answers in the comments space. This process of rewording the questions provoked self-reflection. I had been attached to some ideas as valuable and right and had worded questions which reflected this. I realized I had to drop attachment to prior views and opinions of what should or shouldn’t happen if I hoped to avoid bias and create a useful research instrument (Rubin & Rubin 1995). It became clear that it is simpler to discover what other people think if one’s own beliefs are not in the foreground. My own views and opinions, however modified, could take their place later in the research process.

The re-draft of the second question included the phrase, ‘and sometimes in consultation with colleagues’. This softened it and allowed respondents to understand that they were not being asked to evaluate their own professional judgment in isolation. The third question broadened the enquiry out to attitude and opinion in respondents about the professional environment, their views of the surrounding professional terrain. It was phrased negatively to interrupt the flow, reduce ‘automatic’ responses and keep respondents alert through the rest of the questionnaire. Questions four, five, six and seven were reworked to promote important functions of the questionnaire - to open up topics for discussion, to raise awareness of activities around transition support and to signal these as relevant areas of enquiry which may be looked into later, during the semi-structured interview phase.

The table of transition activities in question eight was created to tease out and discriminate between actions, for example, between seeking and giving information. Again, as well as gathering data, the table would bring to the respondents’ minds numerous transition activities. The fine calibrations of the question obliged participants to reflect in some detail on their own practice. This helped prepare the ground for later data gathering by reminding colleagues of some of the numerous activities that might support transition. In earlier drafts, enquiry into the skills or disposition of young people was evident only in the question on career goal setting. The final draft included self-advocacy and information seeking as well. Question nine on partnership working aimed to identify the partner services and discover levels of communication with them. I hoped to encounter the gaps as well, and use the results as a basis for further enquiry into the difficulties of bringing espoused practice into being. Questions ten, eleven and twelve, the ‘anything else’ questions, all offered a format focused enough to set respondents thinking about improvement, but open enough to encourage respondents to share whatever they wished. This re-wording process portrays the layered purpose of the questionnaire: to identify and gain data about transition activities, to prepare participants for further enquiry, to prompt reflection by participants on their own professional practice, and to share knowledge with participant colleagues on the processes involved in supporting transitions.

The questionnaire was a research instrument of minor significance in terms of the data it produced. However, in describing in some detail how I created and modified the questionnaire, I have illustrated its two main functions – to prepare the ground with participants for later in-depth interviews and to produce sufficient initial data to ignite the research process. I avoided complex or challenging questions and loaded terminology to help maintain a positive attitude in respondents, since I did not want to disaffect them from the research. Rewording and restructuring the questions demonstrated how I was refining my research skills by attempting to bracket my opinions and thinking more about how to get useful information from participants. I was looking to limit my professionally positioned thinking, prevent any attempt to push for change and get on as far as possible with analysing social reality (Soder 1992:258). I was ‘feeling my way in’ to the process. Enquiry into participants’ opinion on professional practice opened up the dialogue on attitude and morale. Offering ‘anything else’ questions at the end of the questionnaire allowed the participants to influence the direction the research would take. In this regard, the questionnaire began a dialogue with colleagues, based on mutual respect, to consider the important features of transition support. The dialogue continued in the semi-structured interviews, in the critical friends meetings and beyond into on-going professional practice.

The young person’s structured interview

In ethical terms, I was in relationship with the young people as an enquiring teacher from their school, not as an outside researcher. However, I needed their informed consent. I had produced an information and consent form, also to take home to their parent or carer [appendix 2]. I handed them out to potential participants, Beechbank under 16 age pupils who had enrolled on college courses, and emphasised that participation was entirely a matter of choice, and there was no problem if they did not wish to participate. Only one young man, on a college engineering course, refused. There had been many occasions at school where he had refused to go to class, agreeing to remain at school only if he was allowed to stay in the pupil support base and so avoid subject classes. Our relationship was not great. However, I regretted the loss of data from a socially and emotionally vulnerable young person. This scenario offered insight into the other participants’ predisposition who also knew me from school. They were

generally favourably disposed (with the noted exception) towards participation in this research. This argued for the usefulness of research conducted by known individuals when involving disadvantaged and disaffected young people, and proved to be a significant strength allowing me quickly to generate information and views from the young people.

The subject matter of the interview schedule [appendix 3] followed the pattern of the staff questionnaire, beginning with questions about the support they had received at school including planning processes, asking which people they had found most helpful in planning their transition, which activities had helped most and concluding with open questions on improvements they could suggest. It had been piloted with family friends of 15 – 17 years, resulting in the syntax and vocabulary being modified. However, since I administered the questionnaire by reading it to participants, explaining where necessary and noting their answers, the accessibility of the text did not become a concern. The questionnaire was structured, but had opportunities for the young person to give their own views and so allowed issues to emerge. I used the data to substantiate the ideas I was forming of the transitions of these young people and the evidence from this strand of the research helped orient me and increase my knowledge of the field. The young person data, like the questionnaire data, would be used to scaffold the semi-structured interview schedule for staff.

Young persons' interviews were conducted individually or in pairs, depending on what was possible and suitable in the circumstances, preferring to avoid individual sessions where young people are liable to clam up. I read the questions to the participant and took note of their answers. The format which proved most productive, in addressing the research questions on experiences and interconnections, was one where I took a mixed group of participants, non-participants and their tutor and held a thirty minute presentation and discussion on the research, covering all the main topics on the interview schedule. This 'warm up' activity was aimed to give the participants confidence in their views. I then extracted the two participants, ex-pupils of the school, from the group and interviewed them together. They both spoke willingly about their transitions.

Structured telephone interviews with parents and carers

The telephone interviews with parents and carers were multi-functional [appendix 4]. These interviews were data gathering opportunities, as well as a means of informing parents about the data-gathering I was undertaking with their off-spring. It was a matter of courtesy for me, as well as ethically required, that I contacted parents and carers following the interviews with their children, having obtained the permission of the young people themselves. I had asked the young people to pass the information document to their parent or carer as a first step in this communication, and followed through by contacting them directly. I was seeking views on the activities and professional support they had found most beneficial to their child's transition, and asking for suggested improvements. I worked initially from a script of three questions, but soon dropped the one seeking their opinion on transition arrangements in general. Parents and carers were happy to discuss their own child but not ready or willing to stray into a more hypothetical or generalised discussion of transition improvements. I sensed from their silences that this may have been in part because of surprise at being asked by someone from school to give their opinion about services in general. It is reasonable to conclude that this was compounded by the time and context constraints of a telephone discussion.

Phase Two

Approach to interviews with professional colleagues

I had conducted data gathering interviews in focus groups as part of an early research study, and I had experience in guidance, planning and counselling interviews with young people and parents / carers as part of the professional practice in guidance and learning support. However, I was new to interviewing one-to-one for research purposes and so reflected on what would be the most useful approach. Having worked frequently in interview-type situations with clients from diverse backgrounds, I had discovered that it does not help in the long run to act as though I was someone or something I was not (Rogers 1967:16). A congruent, prizing and empathic demeanour was also likely to encourage participants to feel safe enough to discuss their feelings about their work to support transition so as to generate an in-depth understanding of the difficulties they

faced. Throughout the interviews I made extensive use of verbal encouragers, for example, 'yes', 'OK', 'right', 'uhuh' and fed back views to participants by summarising what they had said. I approached the semi-structured interviews with the aim of accounting for myself and openly acknowledging who I was and what the research was about, making sure that my demeanour in the interviews was not pretence or a defence (Mearns & Thorne 1988). I hoped to avoid speaking from an undeclared position or misusing the unacknowledged power dynamic in the research interviews (Skeggs 1995). By adopting this approach, of listening patiently and without contradiction, I achieved the 'trade-off', in this carefully managed human interaction, of acquiring data (Bechhofer & Paterson 2000). This I would use to develop my understanding of the commonalities and contrasts in experience of professional participants working in the environment in which post-school transitions take place

How the semi-structured interview schedule for staff was developed

Similar to the questionnaire development, an early draft of the interview schedule was piloted with the external critical friends group. It created far fewer reactions than the questionnaire had done. However, following the first round of data gathering, I re-wrote what I had intended to use as an interview schedule to take account of ongoing findings [appendix 9]. I threw out earlier ideas as I recreated the key questions, (though some, such as the idea of dovetail joints, resurfaced in the more conversational additional prompting or probing questions). I wanted to create a research approach incorporating and utilizing the ideas it produced. I rephrased and refocused the questions to reflect ideas that had arisen in the early data gathering. For example, the first version of question one, which I hoped would prise open contentious issues of labelling and attitudes to inclusion, was:

What would be your definition of additional support needs, and do you find this definition to be useful in practice?

This unwieldy double question had arisen as an attempt to open up discussion of the difficulties in practice of dealing with or responding to different categories of additional support needs, and of the difficulties of working effectively with young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, I had moved away from directly seeking attitudes to labelling and power relations, since I had become aware that this

was not a suitable questionnaire enquiry. I posed a simpler, more accessible question enquiring into working practices. Question one became more focused:

How has your work practice (in post-school planning) with S3, S4 and S5 pupils been affected by the opening out of additional support needs to include those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties?

I then, acting as devil's advocate, used a probe, giving information about the research so far and checking it, and also aimed to elicit further information about working practice:

Teachers and auxiliaries responding to the questionnaire were concerned that planning for post-school transitions may be too late and not responsive enough to individual needs. Have you found this to be the case?

I followed up with an idea that had arisen in a critical friends' discussion:

The post-school transition is an individualised transition (unlike P7 – S1 where a cohort can be planned for, since they share a destination). What factors come into play when planning for post-school transition?

By feeding information from the research back into the interview schedule in this way, I was purposely shaping the research to find out more about early ideas which had arisen. I was using the interview to create a dialogue with participants, referring back to previous discussions and seeking their views on the views of other participants. My aim, by cross-referring in this way, was to ask participants to reflect on their own experiences, and later to use this to piece together data to construct a layered view of the professional environment of post-school transitions.

The remainder of the interview schedule went through similar alterations to account for on-going findings. In their interviews, the young people had said that they would like fun activities to prepare them for transition, whereas teacher respondents had homed-in on the need for good communication between professionals. I juxtaposed these two ideas in the second question into transition support activities. In this way I was asking the professional participants to consider diverse perspectives on transition. I then followed through with a question devised from pupils' widely voiced view that they preferred the less formal atmosphere in college to the atmosphere in school. I wanted to prompt teachers to consider the culture of school in comparison to the culture of college and so elicit responses that might give some explanation of the young peoples' views.

The data from young people and auxiliaries on ‘dovetailing’ activities helped form the two questions on interagency working, and the data from teachers saying they hoped for improved communication with partners I used to set up the question on barriers to communication in general. I made reference to this early data to tease out the views of participants in the semi-structured interviews, and also to illuminate and support their understanding of the data gathering process in which they were participating. The intention here was to hold them as active and informed participants in the research process.

A level of control was achieved by posing the same key questions in the interview schedule to all professional participants (Bechhofer & Paterson 2000). However, the design was responded to the professional data and views occurring later in the interviewing activity and these were posed as secondary questions to subsequent participants. The views of critical friends and participants were incorporated and used to mould the questions. Views and ideas arising in interviews were fed back into the semi-structured interview schedule as the data generation progressed. The inclusion of ideas and views from participants helped shape what the research set out to know more about. By using ideas occurring in the data to shape and direct the discourse on transition among co-professionals, I was reviewing themes and re-working ideas, with participants, in an effort to create a strong and fully fleshed body of views on transition. This approach created some useful homogeneity in the data, but participants throughout opened up new ideas and areas for discussion and at various points directed the interview in the way they wanted.

Analysis

The early analysis of ideas in Phase One was used to mould later research instruments, in particular to focus the key questions on the semi-structured interview schedule for professionals. The main analysis began when audio-taped interviews with professional participants were transcribed and analyzed using a content analysis. The analysis of the data from semi-structured professional interviews took place in three main phases. First I created a description of the data in a content analysis, not reported in detail here, but

covering the following main topics: *communication and partnership working; knowledge of co-professionals and post-school provision; knowledge of young people and identification of additional support needs; supported transitions, in-reach and dovetailed approaches and the barrier presented by the school timetable; college-like approaches and their potentially negative effect on attainment in school.* Following this, I proceeded to create a thematic analysis relying on an inductive approach, where themes were identified from within the data rather than from ideas or theories within the literature. The thematic analysis looked for and discussed those patterns in the data which illuminated some aspect of the key questions and the process was data driven (Braun & Clarke 2006). This analysis is reported in Chapter 3. Finally I produced a more deductive analysis where themes and ideas from the literature provided the framework for further comparative analysis set out in Chapter 4.

The data analysis began with the responses to the questionnaires, the young people interviews and the telephone interviews with parents and carers. I was looking for similarities in the data and recurring ideas. These were, broadly, *the more favourable atmosphere at college; parental anxiety about safety and wellbeing at college; a desire that young people should get a chance to experience possible future options before transition; that transition planning may be too late or not responsive to individual need and the apparent lack of good communication between teachers and post-school partners.* In an effort to think more carefully about its meaning I reduced the data set by discarding data which fell outside these boundaries (Huberman & Miles 1994). From this summary I generated 7 questions from the data to put to the critical friends group in school [appendix 6]. Following the critical friends discussion, I undertook a process of revision and re-working of the semi-structured interview schedule for professional participants. Adhering to the same key questions, but including various additional prompts and probes, each interview followed the same broad outline, but ranged over varying topics, depending on the interviewee.

Immediately after each interview, I transcribed the tape verbatim. This took considerable time, and obliged me to become very familiar with the verbal content of the interview. During this process I understood some data for the first time. For example,

one guidance teacher participant had said “we have to lose the foggy areas” and, during the interview, I had taken this to mean more clarity was needed in school systems, but on listening again I realized the respondent meant we needed to prompt young people, who weren’t fitting in to school, to leave. So listening and transcribing was integral to developing a good understanding of the data. During transcription, I regretted the loss of meanings carried only by the speed or intonation of utterances, and indeed the body language of the participant. If I had taken a language study approach, I was aware that other meanings would have emerged in the data. However, I did not digress from the plan. On completion, I sent the transcript to the interviewee within the week, seeking feedback and offering debriefing before proceeding. In the event, the only comment I received was regarding the unsettling experience of participants reading spoken verbal tics and infelicities in expression faithfully transcribed. Thereafter, to avoid disaffecting the participants, I removed the ‘ehs’ and ‘ums’ and thoughtless repetitions from the transcripts before seeking their feedback.

When the transcript was agreed and ‘signed off’ by the participant, I began the process of coding by extracting categories from the data (Drever 2003). I read and re-read the transcripts for the teachers first, getting a general understanding of the contents of the interviews and noting ideas that were of most interest. In this way, seven broad interrelated areas were identified in the data. Using coloured highlighter pens, I marked sections of dialogue, coding them according to topic. The main colour codes were: green - *transition planning*; yellow - *knowledge of the young person*; pink - *communication and partnership working*; blue - *in-reach and dovetailing activities*; and orange - *college-like approaches at school*. Other topics, not covered by key questions, were identified in the data and, since I considered them to be relevant to the professional environment of post-school transition support, I used them to form new categories, such as a *negative view of school culture* and *problems of behavioural issues*. This highlighting process allowed me to then skim read the transcripts together, and form an overview of the recurring ideas.

I then ‘chunked’ the data from the transcriptions of 7 school staff interviews, according to the topics from the interview schedule (Turner 1994). Chunking was carried out by

collating the data falling into one subject category from the respondents. For example the teachers' responses which contained ideas around *transition planning*, I copied and pasted into one document. I then chunked data around *knowledge of the young person*, and so on. I produced a document for each topic under one heading, where I could read and re-read all the comments on that topic. This allowed me to begin to grasp the shades of meaning given by different participants. It had the effect of detaching the data from its conversational context and so allowing the expressed ideas more resonance. I then ordered the data in each topic in two categories – data which described a barrier to the topic under consideration, and data that contained a positive point or a suggested improvement. This process helped me to identify the topics which had been spoken about most frequently. When reporting on the data, in an effort to show the relative prevalence of views expressed, I started with the most frequently spoken about topics, so, a quantitative approach, in this minor way, did inform the data description. These early efforts, to cluster the data loosely together and make sense of it, formed the basis of the report to critical friends [appendix 7] (Turner 1994). I then adopted the same chunking procedure with the college lecturers' and other participants' responses, but this time in the presentation to critical friends [appendix 9], I highlighted specific pieces of data to illustrate significant ideas. This was in an effort to retain the voices of the participants and thereby give critical friends a more textured and varied feedback session.

The early analysis and reporting created the framework from which the contents analysis was produced. It provided a description of the data in terms of its subject content and has been constructed and presented according to the areas of investigation from the research instruments. I used this process to draw together ideas in the data and these provided the raw materials for the thematic analysis. This initial consideration of the body of accumulated data and the provision of early interpretation for critical friends prompted me to begin the process of identifying themes and choosing those of most consequence to the research aims and objectives for further analysis.

I carried out a thematic analysis of the data, discussed in Chapter 3, having utilized the idea of following the feelings expressed by the participants. When considering the data I

was alert to examples of vehemence, frustration and firmly held views being defended. I developed this approach because I wanted to investigate the conflicts and constraints experienced by professionals, as well as examples of transition practices that participants felt positive about. I went back to an earlier sequence in the research process and re-read and re-considered the transcripts of semi-structured interviews looking for passages where emotions were most discernable. I found fast-flowing or staccato passages with words and phrases repeated for emphasis, emotive language or other verbal techniques showing strong feelings. For the same reason I paid attention to body language and scrutinized what was being said when, for example, the participant was tapping the table. I used words and phrases from the data, where possible, to retain the participants' voices. The analysis progressed from a semantic description of the data, dealing with the shades of meaning within, through to an effort to understand the significance of these themes. A range of emotions were revealed from expressions of anger and disaffection in 'school just dumped us down here', through a sense of a need to create harmony in a conflicted situation in 'creating dialogue and trust on both sides'. A sense of the isolation and weariness experienced by teachers and lecturers was evident in 'having a bit of grace' and 'we should be column seven – FE day'. Finally exasperation was evident in a bleak rhetorical question asked, and quickly answered, by a careers adviser; 'transition to what? There aren't enough places for everybody.'

This stage of the analysis explored how the professionals involved in post-school transitions experienced their work emotionally. The accumulation of participants' feelings, in the main expressions of anger, conflict, isolation, weariness, frustration and unhappiness, albeit at times interlaced with optimism, illuminated the difficulties experienced by professionals engaged in this work. This inductive analysis, deploying ideas on thematic analysis in psychology, provided a foundation for the more deductive, theoretical analysis described in the next chapter (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Key ideas from the literature provided the framework for the next stage of analysis in Chapter 4. I re-read the thematic analysis and went back to the transcripts again, searching for ideas and themes to match those from the literature review. I found a number of these, and used the ideas gleaned from readings to construct a new strand of

data analysis. This analysis aimed to illuminate, through a process of comparison to ideas discussed in the literature, what was going on in the professional environment of transitions in this location, and to discuss ideas for improvements either constructed from participants' views or derived from the literature. The themes of most significance were the barriers to professional linkage and to creating trusted signals of youth's value, low aspiration in young people and the effect of their lack of social capital. I referred to the idea of habitus to under-pin the explanation of ideas such as time-pressure, unhelpful constructions of young people by professionals, and the differences in culture and ethos between school and partner services, all of which were major themes in the findings. Through this reframing of the study's findings in comparison to ideas in the literature, the analysis aimed to create exemplary knowledge of the field. A constant propellant throughout was the search for potential improvements in post-school transition practices.

Conclusion

The aim of this methodology has been to 'show the workings' of this research study to an extent that helps to substantiate its validity and value. The detailed description of how the research instruments were created has been included to give a clear view of 'my workings'. This chapter has given a view also of the ethical considerations I have encountered, the decisions I have made on suitability of methods, and has shown changes in plans. I have portrayed the difficulties and the strengths of working on home territory and how I have adapted the methods to meet these challenges. I have strengthened this study by initially adopting a grounded approach and have continued to feed data back and take account of critical friends' views. While I have focused throughout on the professional environment, I have also retained perspectives from other participants to help give texture to the situation of the study. The data analysis has been extensive, employing three different approaches; content analysis, thematic analysis and analysis in comparison to ideas in the literature. Through this I have sought to achieve valid research and the production of useful exemplary knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

The thematic analysis presented here constitutes a second step in ordering and analysing the findings of the study. An earlier process of drawing together the results of the data gathered from various participants, briefly described in the *Analysis* section of *Chapter Two: Methodology*, and not reported here, was undertaken prior to this construction and discussion of themes. This chapter sets out key themes that best address the research questions.

First of all the aim here is to identify and discuss ideas that contribute to an understanding of what was taking place in the professional environment of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs. The account will examine the feelings of participants and their perceptions of transitions, dealing first with ideas of effective dovetailed practice, in the section *Gradual Dovetailed Transitions*. The theme of dissatisfaction with transitions support processes experienced by participants, and indeed the hurt occasioned by it, will be analysed in the section entitled “*School just dumped us down here*”. *Perceptions of transition support in school and college* will then examine views and attitudes of teaching participants towards their work in identifying and working with young people at transition. In the section entitled *Partnership working*, the analysis will focus on the difficulties experienced by partners in finding time for transition support and in communicating effectively with each other. The apparent absence of a shared understanding of effective practice between professional partners suggested a lack of leadership regarding transition support at practice level, and pointed to the contrasting cultures between school and other services. In addressing barriers to improvement, the final section, *Improvements suggested by participants*, will deal with difficulties in information flow, dysfunctional power relations between teachers and young people and the finding that many teachers do not see themselves as key to the process.

Gradual Dovetailed Transition

From various participants’ perspectives gradual dovetailed transitions were referred to as ideal, and espoused, with two notable exceptions, by participants across the post-school

services. Where this type of transition was reported it tended to be in transitions from special education services rather than current practice for mainstream pupils.

Practical knowledge of the success of gradual transitions came from two teachers with recent experience of working in special education services for pupils with inherent impairments, and the college co-ordinator linking with special education. Progressions to college for pupils in Departments of Special Education were more formalised in the School-Link Programme. These transitions were more gradual, taking place over the course of a year and fully supported with staff working between services. Schools with Departments of Special Education were, therefore, in a better position, the teacher participant believed, than Beechbank, to form good partnerships with local colleges. The second participant, a teacher with past experience of working in the visual impairment service also spoke of the success of a “tailored” transition programme which had been used to support young people with sensory impairment, where school was, “sliding children into specific subject areas in college.” He went on to say, “most of them, by the time they had done a term [at college, one day per week] they actually wanted to leave school.”

The success, in terms of student retention and achievement, of a gradual, dovetailed transition was also discussed by a college participant:

For example, on my full time Skill-extra programme, all the young people who have been on my Thursday one day a week School-Link course have much more success than the ones where I am told, just two weeks prior to them leaving school, there’s this young person and this might be a suitable course for them. They are the ones who tend to fail, or be withdrawn, or drop out because they haven’t had time and the procedures that they need before they settle, and the understanding of how college works.

He went on to speak of the benefit of gradual transitions, where young people get to know the new provider and feel secure in them before leaving school. “It’s really important that they get to know people and exactly who they can contact, about what, because if they don’t, they get very insecure and scared”.

Both educational psychologists observed that teachers and college lecturers generally acknowledged the merit of gradual transitions. One educational psychologist said at the outset of the interview that, for his thesis, he had developed a model of transition he held to be ideal from the perspective of the youngsters and said:

The first thing for me is that there is a gradual transition, and a toe in both camps, so they've got an opportunity to still be in school and experience whatever it is they are going to do [next] and be able to feed back on how that is going.

He agreed with a teacher's comment that a feeling of security was key and suggested that this was more likely if the young person had a good relationship, "a whole two-way thing" with one member of school staff supporting them at this stage. A relationship based on trust, knowing that the teacher was "batting for them, not looking for the first opportunity to get that youngster out of school," was central to this feeling of security. The anxiety about 'dumping', getting that youngster out of school, occurred within the discussion of gradual transition. Co-occurrence of these opposing views of transition, the 'ideal' and the 'unfavourable', suggested that 'dumping' was a significant concern for the educational psychologist.

In-reach to school

The idea of college staff, and other post-school providers, coming in to school to work with young people, a concept inherent in a dovetailed approach, was considered very helpful by teachers in building familiarity with post-school providers and improving transition. A number of respondents pointed to the Careers Convention in school, college presentations to leavers and information trips to college as helpful in bringing ideas and information to young people for them to consider. One school teacher respondent noted that we need more in-reach with college personnel coming into school:

The more in-reach we have, the more familiar the children become with people from the college, and the more accepted they are.

A college participant spoke of the in-reach ,community based activity his department provided – a chefs' club for youngsters at another local secondary school:

We try and reach out to students who are doing home economics at school, but it's open to everybody as far as we are concerned, so it's like an after school club.

He said that the chefs' club helped recruitment into hospitality courses at college, not just of members, but of brothers and sisters too. He also spoke of demonstrations he gave to school home economic groups where preparation skills and industrial experience are showcased. When asked about the benefits of these in-reach activities he replied:

I see the benefits to myself on a personal basis, for my professional development. I rarely get a chance to work with students under sixteen, and it's really just to see them on that edge. I think it is helpful to go out [to schools].

This in-reach opportunity helped him prepare professionally for his work with his youngest students.

However, most of the participants said they had no direct knowledge or experience of the pupils they supported participating in any cross-over activities between school and post-school services. Various participants opined that this would be very helpful in building familiarity with post-school providers and improving transition. One school teacher also pointed out that school teachers were not aware of, and have no links with, the school's business partners. Additionally, he noted that some pupils did not access the Work Aware (work experience) programme and so missed all opportunity to experience anything other than school before leaving. The model of gradual, dovetailed transitions was generally accepted as good practice, but was not part of the experience of the young people leaving Beechbank High School. The school and college professional participants unanimously agreed that more dovetailing activities would be helpful in creating successful post-school transitions.

This 'ideal' type of post-school transition, discussed by participants, included the central elements of taking place over an extended period of time, supported by familiar and well-intentioned members of school staff whom the young person trusted, with

opportunities for staff from post-school provision to come into school and build familiarity, and the young person having the chance to get over fear and insecurity in the new environment before leaving school. Knowledge of these gradual dovetailed transitions was drawn from participants' experience of transitions of young people with inherent impairments progressing from special education settings, rather than mainstream. The theme of 'dumping', emerging in emic data and its contribution to expressions of injury and anger in young people, and dissatisfaction and frustration in post-school professional partners, will now be considered.

"School just dumped us down here"

All the young college participants gave evidence that the atmosphere there was much better than at school, and cited the facts that they were not as restricted as at school, got occasional half days off, were treated as adults and were amongst adults, called tutors by their first name, were allowed to smoke five metres from the building and were allowed to go to the toilet whenever they wanted. There was a sense of relief and some surprise in the young peoples' acknowledgement of their enjoyment of their new learning environment. They had landed on their feet and seemed to realise that their fears about leaving school had been unfounded, or at least greatly exaggerated. It is helpful to set this sense of enthusiasm for college beside a request made by three students that their guidance teacher should come and see how they were getting along at college. Their request suggested that they wanted to show him, prove to him, they were doing well at college. It also suggested they were holding a lingering anger that school had "just dumped us down here". The word 'dumped' connoted the idea that school had perceived them as some kind of rubbish, and they wanted to prove that they were valued in college and doing well.

The perception of post-school transition as school 'dumping' unwanted pupils demanded consideration and analysis since it suggested that transition practice was not supportive of the young people concerned, and the idea appeared in the views of participants of various services and perspectives. The topic of dumping had emerged not as a result of any direct question seeking to enquire into this, but as responses to 'anything else' type questions. The quotation in the paragraph above came from a young person, still in foster care who had reluctantly transferred to college on the strong advice of her

guidance teacher. The idea of school dumping them was echoed by two other young people and conveyed the feelings of dissatisfaction, and indeed injury, because of a failure to meet expectations, experienced by the young people. College participants, careers advisers and educational psychologists spoke of their view that school should have a continuing role in nurturing, sustaining and educating 'non-academic' youngsters as they approach and pass their 16th birthday, in the same way that 'academic' youngsters continue to be nurtured by schools at this stage. These participants also suggested that colleges were unlikely to accept and work well with youngsters who continued to exhibit 'immature' behaviour. It seems a harmful process was taking place within post-school transition support arrangements, causing anxiety in the minds of participants.

The expectation that school should continue to support young people and give equity of provision across 'academic' and 'non-academic' youngsters at this stage was apparent in the perspectives of educational psychologists and college participants. However teachers in the study rejected this role for schools since they viewed themselves and their organization as less well suited to taking forward the education of 'non-academic' youngsters at a point where an individual's vocation or career aspiration became more important. Teacher participants pointed, by and large, to colleges as being more suitable providers for 'non-academic' youngsters at this stage, since they would be better placed to progress vocational education. There was disagreement, therefore, between school teachers and other participants from partner services about what was the best post-16 provision for non-academic young people (and this may have contributed to what was termed 'dumping' at transition).

No in-depth knowledge of young people

A pattern became apparent in the data which offered further insight into this process. In a minority, but still significant number, of cases, teachers did not have a depth of knowledge, in terms of family situation, experience and aspiration, of the young people on their case load who were leaving school. The evidence was visible in the guidance teachers' discussion of the weight of numbers on guidance case loads at Beechbank High School. This exceeded what occurred across similar schools in the region (normal maximums in other schools in the region are 250, and many have smaller caseloads, but in Beechbank a guidance caseload averaged at just under 300). Guidance teachers also

noted that, due to time constraints and pressures, there could be a lack of opportunity to interact with, and get to know, young people. “I never see them to teach history or PSE, so I can’t build up a rapport with them. The main constraint is time to do a thorough job”. In situations where guidance teachers did not teach youngsters personal and social education, or their subject, one whole strand of in-class contact on which to develop a relationship with the young person was missing. In effect guidance teachers were taking a pastoral role with young people and families whom they hardly knew. If guidance teachers did not meet regularly with a young person in the course of their week, they could find themselves attempting to build their transition support for that young person on insubstantial foundations.

The agreed procedure for gathering and sharing pupil information at transition was for the guidance teacher to complete the transition form. However, another member of staff may well have been more intimately concerned with a young person’s support at school, for example a pupil support teacher or assistant who was giving in-class support. In answers to the questionnaire, pupil support assistants said they did not help with information gathering prior to transition. So although the young person would develop a close relationship with their support personnel, because of time constraints and communication difficulties - the impediments associated with working in a large organization - their knowledge and understanding of the pupil was not sought out and included by the guidance teacher tasked to complete the transition form. In other cases, the young person may not have had in-class support, and the guidance teacher may not have been teaching them, so none of the support teachers may have had in-depth knowledge of the individual. At this first stage, therefore, the system for information gathering and sharing was, in certain cases, less than effective.

A lack of personal information on paper for some young people whose additional support needs may have emerged later on in their school career, or whose needs were less obvious in a school setting, or whose needs resulted not from fixed diagnosable disability but from more contingent social, emotional or behavioural problems also contributed to the problem, and created difficulty at time of transition. In the absence of integrated support plans, there was an absence of shareable information on paper. Some failures to identify, formally, young people with additional support needs may have resulted from a reluctance to commit time, (a resource identified by all teacher

participants to be in very short supply), to identification unless absolutely necessary to the smooth running of the school. Identification of additional support needs occurred sometimes as a result of parental pressure, or referrals through the school discipline system. The friction of these encounters created heat, and school services, in particular pupil support teachers, reacted to calm the situation and re-establish good relations with parents and colleagues by formally identifying additional support needs. “The quiet wee mouse at the back of the class,” nonetheless someone with additional support needs, may have gone un-identified.

Incomplete transition information

This idea of dumping was also visible in data from colleges regarding the poor quality or incomplete information on transition forms which should be completed for all leavers, with or without integrated support plans. One college participant said that transition forms “can be seriously misleading” in the information they omit especially about family background:

For example, one young person was orphaned and lived with wider family members, and they put her out when she turned sixteen. She became homeless. Family circumstances were not referred to on the transition form, and this meant I was not properly prepared and just had to deal with the situation when it came up.

Transition forms were often unsigned by the young person, noted another respondent, suggesting that the young people had not been consulted on the information they contained. One respondent suggested that perhaps the guidance teachers did not really know the young people. Information was sometimes missing for young people who had required a “lighter touch” in their support packages in later years. Transition to a new environment could cause regression, noted one participant, and full information about additional support needs is helpful to college, even if support was no longer required at school. In the new type of pupil-centred transition meeting “hard information” on support needs and strategies could be missing, regretted one participant. Another said he interviewed all applicants.

Unsigned transition forms pointed to a failure to give the young people their place, as laid out in policy and procedural guidelines, in the process of collecting and sharing personal information about learning support needs. Perhaps this failure to engage the young person indicated the superficial nature of some teachers' relationships with young people. It suggested that the young person's transition support was constructed as a task on paper, an administration task for the professional who would find spare time from a busy schedule to complete it, at times without any consultation with the young person involved. This perception will be revisited in the discussion of the teachers' construction of young people in the next chapter.

To clarify the significance of not consulting with the young person, it contrasted it with a situation, also described in teacher interviews, where a young person was wholly included in planning and preparation of their transition. In these instances, rare and much needed opportunities arose for the young person to take ownership of his or her own transition and additional support needs. Consultation allowed the young person to become integral to his transition, gave an opportunity for self-reflection, self-advocacy and to experience the locus of control of transition arrangements within himself. The failure, in some instances, to undertake these steps in the process may also have indicated the possibility, suggested to me by a critical friend, that some guidance teachers found colleges too demanding of information and no matter what they provided, it would not be enough. Therefore, they completed the task in a surface and simplified way. But however it occurred, the process of including the young person's view was missing in a number of cases, and this bore out the suggestion by some young people that they feel they are "dumped" by school – viewed as a chore, an administration task, a parcel ultimately to be posted off by the school to the new destination.

An educational psychologist participant spoke about boosting confidence and the need to create a feeling of security in the young person approaching transition. He suggested that this would best be done by transition being supported by a teacher the young person trusted, "not just somebody who pops up because it's time for transition." The psychologist's portrait of successful transition support depicted the trusting personal relationship between the young person at the centre of the process and the teacher. One college participant spoke of a successfully managed transition from school where emotional preparation had helped, "taking away a bit of the fear by dropping things into

conversations” about what to expect at college. The idea of sowing seeds about what to expect at college in young people’s minds while still at school, was wise advice. However, it would only be possible if the school teacher had a good understanding of college practices and procedures and the opportunity to build a relationship with the young person before their transition.

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A failure to engage the young person in the planning process, and a paucity of information on paper about individual support needs, contributed to the situation where young people expressed dissatisfaction about how school had handled their transitions. However, unsatisfactory transitions may have had their origins in the inability of the school to respond to environmental factors. The three young participants who verbalised the feeling of being ‘dumped’ by school could be described as socially, emotionally and behaviourally needy young people. One youngster had been looked after in foster care for a number of years, another had a chaotic lifestyle occasioned by alcohol abuse and offending behaviour in the wider family, and the third presented behavioural problems throughout secondary school which prompted medical investigation into a head injury, but did not lead to any diagnosis. Backgrounds of ‘broken’ homes, acrimonious relationships with parents / carers and other behavioural issues, may have contributed to low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and difficulties in self-actualization, described in sum by careers adviser participants as “immaturity”.

The training provider offered an illuminating perspective on the school’s shortcomings in working with young people with social and emotional difficulties. He spoke of the number of young people at Strathdon Training who had chaotic lifestyles and had never sat exams:

We find a lot of the kids have not had success at all. Bored, bored, bored.
That’s what they say about school. But it could have been a learning difficulty.

The trainer highlighted the person-centred nature of the training offered when he described his efforts to discover a trainee’s learning style and represented the difference to the approach taken by school.

My impression is that school tries to teach them in a certain manner, whereas we have got no two people the same. We work individually. It comes back to learning styles.

Individual learning plans with short, medium and long term goals were made and reviewed on a four-weekly basis. These learning plans contained only what the trainees needed. For example, one trainee attended only for support to achieve independent travel skills. So, for these youngsters with pronounced social and emotional difficulties the training provider highlighted what he perceived as the short-comings, by comparison, of the school's generic curriculum based approach which had developed to provide for larger groups, indeed for whole classes, of young people.

The genesis of disengagement

These two ideas, the idea of difficulty caused by family and medical circumstance, and difficulty created by unsuitable teaching and learning approaches, side by side, suggest a possible genesis of disengagement, a process detrimental to self-esteem in the young people contributing to the feeling of being dumped. The educational psychologists noted in their group interview young people often report to them that teachers say they 'can't' follow a particular career path because it would not be suitable for them. This was also exemplified in one teacher interview relating to steering young people away from unsuitable goals. The effect of "bursting the bubble" of a young person's hopes or dreams, in the view of the educational psychologist, meant that "they are not going to bother" coming up with another idea. Self-esteem was reduced by this process and the young person was discouraged from thinking creatively about his or her own future career plans. The psychologist said that at this point "encouragement is key". He suggested that if teachers were ready to pick up chance remarks about careers plans positively, and build dialogue about their future, this would encourage the development of self-confidence and self-determination in young people. However, teachers, he suggested, offered a critical view more readily than encouragement to young people, and this was, in part, because many teachers did not appreciate their potential role in helping young people with self-development and forward planning. Subject teachers were likely to see this as a job for the guidance teacher. Therefore, within the classroom process, and in informal interaction between teachers and pupils, there may have been a

dynamic which left young people feeling disaffected and ultimately, when they moved on from school, that they had been dumped.

The views from college partners, careers advisers, educational psychologists and, in one case, parents all supported the young people's suggestions that they were 'dumped' by school. Across the data set different ways of describing the 'dumping' were evident. A college lecturer said, for example, "Schools wash their hands of young people". Another said, "schools disown young people" and a third, "schools say 'bye bye, cheerio' and pass them on to college". The educational psychologists spoke of schools, "looking for the first opportunity to get rid of young people," and characterised the attitude of teachers as, "see ya". Careers advisers said, "Schools push young people in the direction of college inappropriately." One parent spoke of "the twilight zone" that his son had gone into when attending, or rather failing to attend, college as a winter leaver. There was a weight of evidence that various and differently located participants shared this perception of 'dumping' and these participants believed teachers to be at fault for this. Indeed this idea was alluded to by one teacher when he said, "We have got to lose the foggy areas" and ask young people to leave "when they have finished with the rules and conventions of the school".

What the young people describe as 'dumping' was, it seems, taking place, and teachers were, in certain cases, looking for opportunities to push 'non-academic' young people to leave school. School teachers at Beechbank, like others across the country, were exposed to pressure from educational policy makers, education service heads, their associated parents, the general public through the media, HMIe and their higher education partners to improve attainment. Schools are judged according to the number and quality of passes at standard grade and higher, taking roll number and free school meal ratio into consideration. In a council inclusion review in 2006, lower results were noted at Beechbank High School. "The fifth year results were lower than national averages . . . the lowest in the last 5 years". Although not demonstrable within this study, it is arguable that the pressure this type of publication exerted on the school to improve fifth year attainment in national examinations contributed to sapping the energy and resources needed to create appropriate courses for 'non-academic' pupils, or appropriate curricular experiences in fifth year supportive of vocational education. The SQA attainment agenda was prioritized and the status quo preserved.

Problems of career motivation – disillusionment and fear

One of the college participants suggested, “Schools just give out packages, and so do the colleges. You either get it, or you don’t, and that’s not good enough.” He went on to suggest that the attainment agenda was a ‘package’ agenda, and led educational professionals to assess young people in terms of their ability to achieve within the confines of the exam diet. This participant expressed the view that the curriculum was set without consultation with the young people, and if a young person does not ‘get it’, and was unlikely to get it, then they were liable to be dumped. He contrasted the demeanour of an apprentice and a winter leaver at college.

Well, an apprentice is more motivated, self-disciplined, has a final goal and is determined to succeed, to use a term. A winter leaver has been disowned by the school for whatever reason, is disaffected from the school for whatever reason and is just here till Christmas, so what does it matter?

The distinction here between the young people lay in the motivation and desire, or the lack of it, to engage with the offered curriculum. He suggested that because of pressure regarding attainment, teachers did not have the time to give to listening, supporting and helping young people develop skills and abilities in self-advocacy, self-confidence and self-esteem that could have helped develop motivation and prompted more positive transitions.

All respondents discussing Christmas leavers did so in a negative way, and suggested that they can be totally disillusioned as they wait out their time at school. One teacher said:

It’s a litigious thing whereby they have to stay to Christmas. It’s just nonsense. They should be able to leave with their peers at the end of fourth year.

Another teacher said that they always got into trouble:

They are literally roaming the school, not wanting to access classes and being a bit abusive to teachers.

One respondent noted that the group is predominantly young men who do not know what they want to do after school. A number of respondents expressed the view that young people with additional support needs do not take ownership of their own progression plans, one suggesting that they may not have accrued the skills to plan for themselves, and another respondent spoke about the need to shift the responsibility to the young person through making sure they understand “the key role they are going to play”. Transition planning is a dialogue where the teacher “takes the lead from the pupil.”

On the other hand, some respondents commented on the problems of low aspirations and unrealistic ideas, and noted that fear plays a major role in hindering transitions. “The fear of getting on the number 23 bus” was discussed by the flexible curriculum co-ordinator in school. She maintained that young people can be afraid to step over the threshold of new organizations and into new peer groups without the knowledge of what is going to happen next. While disaffection from school was apparent, an equally strong emotion, occasioned by the prospect of transition, was fear of the new and unknown, and trepidation at taking the next step. The effects of fear in young people constitute another aspect in this analysis of the theme of the dumping of ‘unwanted’ young people by school. When asked about the most helpful support that can be given to young people approaching transition, the flexible curriculum co-ordinator at Beechbank High School spoke of the emotional state of young people:

There were some young people who we actually got appointments for [at college] and they physically would not go and take that appointment unless we actually took them there. There’s a thought process that’s not being channelled into them early enough . . . I think we are needing to do more work with the local college where we take them out and they have to spend the day there. The actual physical fear of having to go somewhere in town you’ve never been before, for some kids who have the most difficulties . . . that was the really hard part.

Other school participants noted that young people can be “really insecure and scared” at the prospect of attending college.

The careers advisers said they found the fear experienced by young people at this stage to be a barrier to them doing a good job for them. The emotion the careers advisers described was as much about fear of drawing attention to self as it was about fear of the new:

They will not self-refer. To be honest, a lot of youngsters do need quite a lot of help before they will actually put anything into motion. They don't know how to do it for themselves in their lives.

College participants acknowledged too that, “it is a big step,” and young people feel fear coming to college and lack self-confidence:

If you are 15, coming in to college is a big thing. Maybe it is the age they are, but they don't like going into the college refectory. There are older groups there. At school they are the big ones, and here they are not. It can be quite scary.

Another college participant noted that the amount of ‘looking after’ they receive at college was less than school:

They are at an age when they are very vulnerable, and it is a big step, a big step at that age, fifteen, when you have been told to go here, do that, and now they are more or less left to their own devices, so it's a big step.

As well as fear of the unknown and peer group pressure, there was evidence in the data of other factors which gave rise to fear. Careers advisers offered some interesting insights into this aspect of transitions. “The transition meeting is too intimidating – full of middle class women professionals.” This summary description suggested an unsupportive process where the young person's needs and preferences were marginalized in favour of the professional's voice. Careers advisers then went on to say that “support for young people melts away when they leave school”, and this in itself caused fear and uncertainty in young people and their families. Lack of knowledge and

information about possible future provision also gave rise to feelings of fear. As careers advisers pointed out, “Schools do not understand Get Ready for Work” and so were unable to give helpful advice regarding post-school training opportunities. In this way, feelings of being belittled by transition processes, a lack of support post-school and poor information on training opportunities were all factors that could account for feelings of fear in young people.

Power differences between school and college environments

An educational psychologist noted:

The key thing is respect. They [young people] don’t feel teachers respect them, as people, and they don’t understand them. And bang. They go into the college environment and they are treating you as adults. You’ve got respect. You’ve got responsibility and . . . it’s done in a supported way.

While one teacher commented on the advantages of increasing participation in and ownership of learning, and that ‘college-like approaches’ at school would help young people look beyond the immediate time horizon, teachers were all concerned that a less directive approach to teaching and learning would lead to indiscipline and the undermining of authority in school. Junior pupils, it was said, look up to and copy seniors, so it was suggested that ‘college-like approaches’ might undermine discipline further down the school. One respondent noted, “Pupils see it as a sign of weakness that a teacher is friendly with them.” The same respondent said:

Any time we have wanted to give them extra privileges in here, such as signing in when they’ve got classes, we always seem to hit a snag. Either kids abuse it, or staff aren’t happy, or parents phone in and say ‘what’s going on?’ So it’s difficult to change a mindset.

So, although there had been efforts to develop more respectful practices, offering more autonomy to young people in senior years, they had not taken root.

Perhaps the reason could be found in another teacher’s comment:

The college regime is a wee bit more flexible, more liberal on the face of it, but, let's face it, with Central College or others, if somebody is out of line, they chuck them out straightaway. They can do that. We can't.

This idea, that there is a clear limit to the college's inclusiveness, was confirmed in a college participant's response. When asked to comment on the college working with young people with behavioural difficulties, the "badly behaved" youngsters, one participant said:

Historically schools have given us the young people they can't work with, so why do they think we can work a miracle with these challenging young people? Schools have to realise that we have to keep our full time students happy. If we don't keep our full time students, we don't get funding and we don't get to keep the college open.

The data on this theme emerged unasked and portrayed post-school transition as a time of stress for some young people with additional support needs and their families. Participants from partner agencies voiced concern at the lack of equity in school provision for non-academic youngsters at this stage. Teachers spoke of not knowing young people as fully as would be helpful to manage smooth transitions. This was supported by information on the busy-ness of the curriculum in secondary school, and the prioritization of the attainment agenda, with few opportunities to engage pupils in their individual career planning. The college transition co-ordinators discussed the omissions in transition information from school and the problems resulting from this. They went on, along with other partner agencies, to express their disenchantment with schools 'dumping' young people. Fear in young people of new environments, of new peer groups and of drawing attention to themselves, also played a part in their perception of being dumped by school. The more adult construction of young people in college, where they could, in fact, be summarily dismissed, contributed to their more positive response to the college environment.

Some of the young people felt injured by this 'dumping' process and wanted to assert their value and re-establish their identities as valued and valuable people, an idea considered in the literature review. From the perspective of the partner agencies,

(college, careers and educational psychology), the lack of courses suitable for non-academic senior pupils, and the fact that they leave school with insubstantial personal transition information, combined to place the school in a poor light and set a barrier to interagency working.

Perceptions of transition support in school and college

In the questionnaire in Phase One of the study, teachers and pupil support assistants claimed they were generally confident that they understood what constituted additional support needs and were confident in their ability to identify pupils with additional support needs. One teacher noted concern that sometimes additional support needs went unnoticed, saying “not all additional support needs are obvious,” and, “what is an additional support need for one, is not for another”. This comment demonstrated the teacher’s view of the way the identification process had moved from diagnosis of a difficulty inherent in the young person, towards identification of difficulty in, and arguably as a result of, specific educational situations. Another said that “the nature of additional support needs means that for some we overlook the need and the provision”. In this comment lay a lack of clarity about identification. A further comment, “Among those I work with I believe I am clear [who has additional support needs] but it is often an evolving story,” pointed to this teacher’s view that relationship with, and good knowledge of, the young person is central to identification. He suggested that since needs change, no assessment is finalised, but is on-going and formative (and also that he was not confident of practices across the school and could not generalise from his own perspective). Taken together, these comments showed that, since traditional methods, relying on medical diagnosis, were no longer accepted practice in determining who had additional support needs, teachers found themselves operating in some degree of uncertainty. One teacher said that the Additional Support for Learning Act (2004) had been helpful in clarifying this. However, information about who carried out the assessment, what formats were used and whether a strengths-based approach was adopted was missing from the data.

Teachers itemised their involvement in activities used to support young people at transition. These ranged across activities such as leading and contributing to multi-agency planning meetings, developing transition skills in young people, acting as a

conduit for information for post-school providers, collating and passing on personal information to appropriate agencies, and consulting with young people and families regarding career plans. The activities teachers said were most helpful were seeking and giving advice, consultation with the young person and referral to partner agencies. Consulting with the young person individually about their career plans was seen as the most helpful activity of all, and consolidated the teachers' view that the most effective transition planning is person-centred. One teacher identified the simple fact that the cohort disaggregates at this stage as a major barrier to effective transitions support. This stage, he said, was quite different from the transition of primary pupils to secondary, the transition of most significance to educational psychologists who have a major role to play in linking these two educational services. While approximately 80% stayed on at school, 20% each took their individual next step on diverse career paths. This diversity of destination created difficulty in providing suitable support. No large employer locally would scoop up leavers en masse, as mining and manufacturing industries had done in the past. Each young person would chart his or her own route into various college courses, post-school training or employment and this lack of uniformity created difficulty in transition support. This theme will be revisited in the discussion chapter.

Teachers were less confident, none strongly agreeing, that they had the correct planning process in place across the board, and one cited the changing needs of young people and a framework that may not have been responsive enough. The pupil-centred approach to post-school planning was embraced by most teachers with one saying, "it is the only way to proceed". Teachers generally claimed to know the post-school destinations of the young people with additional support needs they work with. One teacher noted that a 'most helpful' activity was "realising that the above [transition support] is not a one time only event, but part of an on-going provision which needs re-visited and re-defined." The suggestion here was that building up a transition package for a young person took place over time, and changed with the young person's changing ideas and needs. This emphasised the flexibility, responsiveness and the adaptability required of teachers who support transition successfully. Aiding the development of skills in young people to support themselves was not picked out by teachers as most helpful. While this approach might arguably have the most long-term benefit for young people, teachers may have considered it late in the day, with transition approaching, to work on, for

example, self-advocacy skills. The teachers' focus was on ensuring 'joined up working' with other professionals, rather than developing transitional skills and nurturing self-confidence and planning skills in the individual. Teachers also did not rate the more 'active' activities such as events, tasters and shadowing as particularly helpful, preferring rather liaison with partner agencies. This was at odds with the preferences of young people who, from their perspective, saw the benefit of "fun activities" to support transition.

Knowledge of young people and pupil-centred approaches

One behaviour support teacher commented that good knowledge of the young person was essential to effective transition planning. Relationship building was done "little by little", getting to know what the young people were thinking and "how they feel about what they're doing and where they see themselves going. This was about creating dialogue and a relationship, with trust and information flowing both ways." The flexible curriculum co-ordinator in school noted that some youngsters have very low educational attainment and exceptionally poor life-skills:

We have more pupils coming up now from primary school with social and emotional needs, that's for whatever reason – divorce, poverty, medical reasons, parents with addictions, and they've probably started experimenting with stuff like that themselves.

He suggested that social and emotional difficulties were increasing and also commented that family and emotional life can change really quickly for young people.

In the semi-structured interviews, sensitive, person-centred approaches in support of transitions of young people with additional support needs were discussed by participants from school and college. Two participants, one from school, one from college, gave accounts of how they worked in close trusting relationships with young people in transitions. The school teacher summarised best practice in this process in this way:

It's about creating dialogue and a relationship that means there's trust and information flowing both ways.

Other participants, the educational psychologists in particular spoke in more theoretical terms, espousing the importance of creating dialogue and trust on both sides as young people prepared to leave school, but not describing their experience of it.

Of the two participants who had the confidence to describe their own practices in supporting transitions, rather than talking more theoretically, both demonstrated a receptivity and sensitivity to the needs of young people. The school participant couched her remarks within a discussion of the transition planning meeting, saying that this formal activity comprised only one small part of what she did to support transition:

My transition planning for young people isn't a once and for all event. It's something we talk about a little bit, we come back to it again, and then we come back to it again. There's a constant dialogue going on. It's a very individual thing.

The idea of a constant dialogue occurred across the teachers' data and indicated a stepping out from the more common teacher pupil power dynamic into a new type of relationship where "the teacher takes the lead from the pupil," and "the young person takes the key role." Evidence that this was a departure from the norm for teachers was derived from the energy and conviction with which this topic was discussed. There was a sense of getting to the heart of participants' beliefs in their own good practice in supporting transitions in young people with additional support needs. There was a fluency and energy in the conversations which suggested that the views were passionately held. The tone of the conversations indicated the empathy and positive regard the teachers held for their young charges and spoke of their readiness to provide strong emotional as well as practical support for them at transition.

College lecturers also discussed the importance of the quality of relationship between adult and young person. One spoke of the small classes at college and how this could help promote trusting relationships and gave enhanced opportunities for guidance, something the college lecturer, unlike the subject teacher in school, expected to get involved in. The college participant who spoke at length about his work to create close, trusting relationships with young people, said:

We don't butter them up, for sure. We say, you're in FE now, an adult learning establishment. And it's a big, big step at that stage. I've got two teenagers myself, and it's all about peer pressure, appearance, the clothes you wear, the way you talk. If you don't fit or conform, it can make life very difficult. So, we try to break down the barriers, treat them as adults (pause) and then, we just make it really easy for them.

On the surface he stressed the uncompromising nature of FE, but then immediately conceded that he was making their settling in process as easy as possible. His description of his approach at this stage demonstrated his compassion for what the young people were going through. However, he did not ignore the constraints of college life, which differed from school:

Every establishment has its rules and regulations and it is made clear [to young people] what's expected of them. If they abuse the privileges, I think they know it is straight back to school, or out of college.

So while this participant worked hard to create a supportive trusting relationship with young people at transition, he readily acknowledged the college system of discipline was based on an understanding that an unsettled student's college place would be terminated.

The college participant, like the school teacher, gave evidence of person-centred approaches, respect for the young person and receptivity and sensitivity to the on-going pressures experienced by young people at this stage. In these conversations the creation of a new power dynamic between adult and young person, based on positive regard, was demonstrated, and the adult's compassion for the young person, while helping him/her to meet the demands of the new learning environment, was apparent. This type of positive trusting relationship was contained in the evidence of only two participants.

Partnership working

In responses to questionnaires, early in the data gathering, aspects of creating and maintaining partnerships were highlighted. Teachers said they have good links and regular contact with careers advisers, educational psychologists, integrated community

school team members and social work. These partner services, who worked closely with young people with additional support needs and their families, were invited to participate on a weekly basis at the school's liaison group. With the exception of social workers, who attended much more rarely, professionals from these agencies were regularly seen in school. Teachers therefore knew the individuals personally and could easily approach them if need be. Links with partners providing post-school services, for example, college, training providers and employers, were not generally considered good. College staff were rare visitors to Beechbank High School, and employers and training providers never seen. So, although the school had an active weekly liaison group of family support services, it was not frequently reaching out to the next sphere of support and including post-school providers.

The effect of time constraint was a notable feature of early findings. The deputy head teacher who participated early on commented, "The questionnaire took longer than you said!!!", and conveyed, especially in those three exclamation marks, the sense of being sorely pressed for time, experiencing irritation at being asked to do a non-essential task and readily communicating this frustration to the enquirer. There was no sense that leadership was being given to advance professional practice to support post-school transition. It gave an early indication of one of the recurring themes in this study, the reaction to demands on teachers' time and the struggle to determine priorities. Teachers and pupil support assistants commented that planning for transition needed to begin earlier and be more responsive to individual needs. Pupil support assistants would have liked to see continuing support from known adults, themselves, in fact, for young people in the early days after they leave school and progress to college. They also suggested the appointment of a liaison officer with practical knowledge of local opportunities in employment and training, to make up for short-comings they perceived in support provided to young people at transition.

There was an emphatic message from another teacher, also making free with exclamation marks, that "communication!!!" with partners needed to improve, and that school staff and partners should, "collaborate more effectively". More interagency, collaborative and joint planning meetings were called for by four school respondents. "We should see college staff in planning meetings [for young people] in S4". One teacher expressed concern that links with social work were not working, and this may

have been because social workers only rarely attended the school's liaison group meeting. Another school respondent called for more in-put and accessible funding for smaller groups – “at present, if colleges don't provide 'it', it's very difficult to find another provider for that age group”. This final comment pointed to the fear that, even if partnership working were improved, there was still not enough on offer to young non-academic leavers.

Post-school transition planning meeting

Because of its complex purposes, the transition meeting was the focus of negative commentary about partnership working from a number of participants in semi-structured interviews. The content of the meeting could be inappropriate, often focusing on alternative assessment arrangements and attainment, in the opinion of careers advisers. They noted that they were being invited into meetings for young people with additional support needs in S3, in line with policy requirements, but said that this threw up another problem, since this was too early to expect to create accurate career plans. Careers advisers were concerned that these transition meetings were sometimes “off target”:

It's a transition meeting, but it's focusing on how they are going to get through standard grades, so you might have the psychologist there talking about, 'have you tried mind-mapping?' Well, that's probably very helpful for revision for standard grades, but it's not going to make a huge amount of difference to how you perform in the job market.

The careers advisers suggested that differences in grades at standard grade make little or no impact on employment prospects. They pointed to another set of skills that would improve employment chances. Whether a young person could phone up an employer, get on a bus, write a speculative letter, do a CV, and whether they had a good reference and some common sense, were mentioned by the careers advisers as far more important to employment than grades at standard grade. One career adviser said:

I have sat in meetings where I have thought, gosh that's very interesting but it could have been summarised in five minutes. I have been here half an hour and it's not pertinent.

College participants also noted their frustration at the lack of 'hard' information in transition meetings:

I agree with the principle that the young person should be at the centre, but the whole meeting is taken up with a mapping exercise with the young person saying what their wishes, dreams and aspirations are. But I am missing out on the information that is so essential for me when helping that young person make a smooth transition to college.

These difficulties may have occurred because of the 'chairing' teacher's concern about how to make overt sensitive information regarding academic achievement and additional support needs within a mixed congregation of the young person, parent or carer and educational professionals. Balancing the need for giving 'hard' information with the need to conduct the meeting sensitively and positively for the young person and his/her family would be a hard task. Offering unconditional positive regard to the young person, while objectifying and concretising their difficulties and additional support needs, in a way that is clear and useful to all, demands a high level of diplomacy. When achieved, such a meeting could create a very sound basis for a positive transition.

Time constraints affect partnerships

Time, or the lack of it, was identified by all staff in answer to the question about barriers to communication, and the fact that partner agencies are often not available at times when school staff try to get in touch. One teacher expressed the view:

Time has to be up there, by miles. I'll have a window at some point in my daily existence, or my weekly existence, to make contact with another agency. And, of course, they're not sitting there at the other end, twiddling their thumbs, waiting on me 'phoning.

Another said no specified structure was in place or time set aside for communication and partnership working, and this added further difficulties.

It's time. People at college are busy, people at school are busy. And I think we need, not just to set aside time, but we need to be able to establish certain

systems of working so that [tapping the table for emphasis] things are ingrained, so that they happen without thought.

Systems for internal communication with partners within school was the concern of the same respondent who said there was no agreed way to communicate with other staff in school, and this hindered the development of a whole school understanding of how we are supporting post-school transition. Another teacher said that teachers tend to think about support for individuals in isolation, and do things ‘ad hoc’ and reactively. The high number of agencies involved with individual pupils, he suggested, can lead to difficulty in communicating with all parties.

This view of the time-pressured culture in schools, and the reactive nature of teachers when required to act in concert with other professionals, exemplified some origins of attitudes and behaviour inimical to interagency working in schools and colleges. One teacher suggested wearily that good communication boils down to, “having a bit of grace” with partners. An educational psychologist described the problem in this way:

It’s a completely cultural thing, and part of it is, ‘it’s your job, or it’s his job, or it’s their job. It’s not my job’. But we need folk to stop and [takes a deep breath followed by a two second pause]. OK, let’s move on now. And then you would get a calmness coming in, and people not just being reactive to everything that is coming their way.

Amidst the negative commentary about time constraints and teachers being ‘reactive’ and trying to dodge what could be seen as ‘extra’ work, an idea of a solution was, nevertheless, perceptible. Participants were looking to create a space in time and place for forward planning of interagency work to support transition. The idea of a network of professionals working to support post-school transition, developing a system, and sharing training in this, was mooted by both school and college staff, and will be discussed in the following ‘improvement’ section. Similarly, good use of email and regular telephone updates were seen as a helpful means of building good communication, since a number of respondents commented that “a constant dialogue” is best practice here.

Other barriers to partnership working

Pupil support teacher participants in school often did not know staff in college and other services, and commented that being able to put a face to a name is essential to good communication. One respondent commented that there is far less personal contact with post-school providers than with primary school colleagues, where transition liaison is well-established, and that face-to-face meetings really do make a qualitative difference:

It's establishing personal contacts. If you have good working relationships with people, and especially can put faces to names, it makes it a whole lot easier, because then people will go out of their way to meet with you. And this job is all about relationships. I think personal contacts, how you get on with people, is definitely key.

Suggestions of how to increase opportunities for personal contact followed this commentary, and the ideas will be discussed later in the 'improvement' section.

Two participants with experience of the Skills for Work programme gave strongly worded accounts of the difficulties in getting pupil groups out of school and into college for the short weekly session of vocational education. The school participant spoke of the unhelpful reaction of subject teachers:

I got a lot of flack, I mean, real face-to-face stuff. How dare you take pupils out of my class?

Because pupils were missing a period of subject teaching, the teachers feared that this would be detrimental to attainment. She also spoke of transport difficulties. Pupil groups aged under 16 years needed buses laid on, which the college staff did not at first appreciate. The college participant noted:

Three hours is a huge bug-bear because of the school's period slots, and needing children back so as not to miss other subjects.

The school participant said:

Skills for Work . . . it's a god-send, but it's for good kids . . . and the message we keep getting is they [college] don't want the badly behaved kids.

These comments portrayed the friction created when two dissimilar services attempted to create joint working. Colleges wanted to engage young people who have an aptitude and interest in the vocational areas they are offering. Schools, on the other hand, wanted the young people who are most disengaged from education, and probably the most 'badly behaved', to engage in the college experience and return to learning through finding the enjoyment at college that has eluded them at school. These data pointed up the differences in school and college systems, in how young people were viewed, and in time allocation across the week. They also suggest a lack of integrated assessment or responses to issues of behaviour being shared amongst professionals. Add to these a lack of personal contact and the evident friction, when trying to create joint working to support post-school transition, was understandable.

Careers advisers' perspective

Career advisers expressed concern about the practical difficulties, for example travel and missed classes, of college placements for young people while still at school. One commented:

There's a lot of reluctance by school to send S4 pupils one day a week because it will have a knock-on effect on their standard grades, and obviously, staff feel they have put a tremendous amount of effort into this young person, and to be told they are going to miss loads of classes, they are understandably unhappy about it, even though for the young person it might be far more beneficial to go to college one day a week than to end up with a 6 in some subject.

The view that schools were more concerned to achieve high attainment figures overall, rather than focus on progression needs of individuals can be seen here. Careers advisers went on to say that there were difficulties in communication and partnership working with school, and suggested that this was due to the large number of staff working in a large school. The geography of the school also made trying to find teachers for face-to-face communication difficult and they admitted to resorting to less personal methods of

communication. They pointed out that finding and meeting teachers in other smaller schools, with a single guidance suite, was easy by comparison. Teachers not reading nor replying to emails was given as an example of ineffective communication, and careers advisers also commented that their own access to email was limited, since they could access one of their addresses only when logged on to the network at school, due to IT difficulties. Similarly, careers advisers commented that getting an answer to a telephone enquiry at school could be a slow process. Difficulty occurred because teachers could not be contacted when in class and no voicemail was available.

Communication and partnership working with agencies other than the school gave careers advisers cause for comment:

College isn't even very good at having open evenings at the time of year when we are desperate.

Although they were aware of pre-induction courses for women returners, they commented that they did not know why this type of course was unavailable to school leavers. College had kept careers advisers informed of young people who would not be offered a place to continue at college, so that they could arrange support for them. Careers advisers suggested that training providers and schools should have closer links since "schools don't understand Get Ready for Work", but cautioned that, since they must complete the individual action plans, school could not leave careers advisers out of the loop:

You do have to be careful about people thinking they'll short circuit the whole thing. The slight danger then is that the school hooks into a training provider, develops a link with them, but they don't realise about the other training providers out there.

This would prevent the giving of impartial careers advice, a key function of the careers service. Careers advisers expressed the view that direct contact between school and employers may also be inappropriate because young people with additional support needs were unlikely to go straight into employment.

Friction between the careers service and the training provider was also apparent. As the only referring agency, Strathdon had a close partnership with careers advisers whose task it was to draw up the trainees' individual action plans and visit the service "once a week to oversee changes to the training plans". The trainer spoke of communication difficulties with the careers service:

At the moment careers are no' talking to us because of our advert. Some young people came to us through the advert, and we asked them if they'd done Get Ready for Work, and it turned out they'd done three already and been dismissed off it.

This had caused consternation amongst careers advisers, since they thought the training provider should have liaised with them in advance of attempting to recruit the young people.

Shared rationale and respect for role

Barriers to communication were described by one psychologist as proceeding from people not understanding the work of partner organisations:

Generally, in multi-agency working, the barriers come from people not understanding the agendas of organizations, the pressures of the organizations and the practicalities of working within that organization, or what one person's remit can possibly provide.

Organizational culture seemed to supersede the need to understand the role of external partners. Low levels of confidence in the work of the school in delivering support to young people as they approach transition, was also discussed:

There's got to be an understanding of why we are doing what we are doing and, are we working to the same end?

A common goal and shared understanding of the rationale behind partnership endeavours would, it was suggested, enhance communication and effectiveness. Later in the interview the educational psychologist commented:

People need to feel they are being used and used well by the school. Nothing was happening, so partners fell away because they didn't feel there was a purpose in coming in.

A second plank in successful partnership working, was described as funding being in place for the activity. In the case of young people progressing from departments of special education:

There's an investment by the college [in partnership activities with schools] because they know that they are going to have that person, and the practical bit is, the funding is going to follow.

However, from a perspective very similar to that of the careers advisers, the dangers of developing very close relationships or personal communication becoming too cosy, were pointed out. He gave examples of a young person being taken in to a department of special education without going through the correct referral and assessment process, thereby keeping the numbers in that department up (and thus contributing to securing its future). He discussed training providers being invited in to a nearby school by a friend on the staff, and that they had received payment for their services. The discussion concluded with the comment, "If staff get too chummy, then impartiality can go out of the window".

College perspectives

Across the board college staff commented that communication with school was not good enough and one participant said that, for her, meeting people had improved communication – school staff were more willing to get in touch once she had met them. Another participant noted:

People are protective of their zones, but boundaries are out of the way if you know someone.

A second difficulty in communicating with schools, raised by a number of college participants, was not being aware who to contact:

Teaching staff seem to go through a complete change. We maybe had one contact person and then that person gets taken off that role and goes on to something else, and we find that with a lot of schools. There's no continuity.

There was a formal communication channel said one participant:

We try very hard to keep communication channels open. We have monthly meetings and there's a representative from every secondary school, so we do our bit.

An opposing view was also offered by a college participant from the construction team, who said "sitting down in a stuffy meeting", was not very helpful to productive communication:

When everything becomes formal, it becomes a millstone, in my opinion, and nothing gets done.

He also discussed the different purposes of school and college and a mismatch in goals:

What are we trying to achieve here? Are we trying to achieve what industry requires, or is it what the individual requires? What is the college's role? Now that is a heavy question.

He was considering the role of education at school in the personal development of individuals, compared to the role of college in equipping those individuals to take their places effectively in specific industries. These thoughts were set beside a concern for the welfare of young people as they approach potential employment:

I don't want to disappoint anyone by having to say to them half way through the course, you're not going to make it, because you don't want to set them up for a fall, so you have to be fairly certain at the beginning that there is no reason why they can't go into industry.

Improvements suggested by participants

Information for young people about post-school provision

Across the board the young participants spoke of school pupils needing more encouragement to leave school and go to college. The suggestions for improvement from young people participants centred on the need for more information about possible next steps to be made available to school pupils at different times throughout the school year. Five student participants went on to suggest the need to use a variety of communication methods and mentioned assemblies, posters, tannoy announcements, special events and videos to get young people's interest. Another student was ready to offer practical assistance to younger peers, and said, "I would go up to school and tell them about college." Two others urged that transition events should be tailored to individual career planning. This was to preclude their own earlier experience of sitting through college information sessions irrelevant to them and their intended careers, and deeply uninteresting. There was a clear advocacy of a 'fun' approach to make young people "think a bit", and a suggestion that more encouragement was needed, with chocolates and other treats, to increase enjoyment and raise an atmosphere of aspiration and expectation at transition events.

The timing and quality of transition information was the subject of comment by pupil support assistants. One improvement suggested was that young people should "be informed of exactly what is available for them after school," at least a year in advance, and have access to "a liaison officer, not careers, with more practical information". Whilst careers advisers had noted that schools did not understand Get Ready for Work, it was the training provider who suggested:

I think that training providers have got to have more links with schools.
Letting kids at school know what we are doing, to let them know that
Strathdon is not like school. I think it's important to get the young ones out
there to see that there are training providers and they're nothing like school.

Pupil support assistants expressed the view that careers advisers were themselves not sufficiently in touch with local opportunities, or with the young people, to offer good advice and information. A number of teachers also proposed that one member of staff,

or designated small team, with sole responsibility to link to post-16 providers, should be instituted in school, and the appointment of pupil support assistant staff, with a specific transition remit to work across school and college, should be considered. This suggested improvement opened up a discussion about how information was best relayed to young people, and an opposing viewpoint was stated by the educational psychologist. He suggested that transition is best supported by a teacher the young person trusted, “not just somebody who pops up because it’s time for transition,” arguing that although appointing one person as a transition co-ordinator in school might suit professionals in school, “that doesn’t necessarily suit the pupils”. He then emphasised the importance of subordinating systems to individuals, and of holding the young person at the centre of the process.

The quality of the relationship between young person and professional supporting transition was discussed by participants as they considered its importance in helping to develop useful thinking and self-advocacy skills in young people. One pupil support teacher expressed the view that, since young people with additional support needs may not have accrued the skills to plan for themselves, teachers needed to prepare to shift the responsibility to the young person through making sure they understood “the key role they are going to play”. This shift needed in the teacher-pupil dynamic was the subject of consideration by another school teacher. Transition planning should become a dialogue where the teacher “takes the lead from the pupil”, he suggested. The flexible curriculum co-ordinator in school surmised, “There’s a thought process that’s not being channelled into them early enough . . .” and went on to suggest visits to post-school providers to kick-start young people into thinking in a useful way about post-school transition. This potential shift in inter-personal relationship between teachers and pupils approaching transition would allow for an improvement advocated by an educational psychologist. He said he could see “massive benefits” of college-like approaches in school. This was then teased out:

The key thing is respect. You [young people] go into the college environment and they are treating you as adults. You’ve got respect. You’ve got responsibility and it’s done in a supported way.

The psychologist's portrait of successful transition support depicted a trusting, respectful personal relationship between teacher and young person at the centre of the process. This portrayal included the idea that every support teacher would develop links to future provisions to enhance understanding and develop relationships, so the teacher could feed back useful information and 'drop ideas in' to young people's minds at appropriate times. The psychologist suggested that if all teachers were ready to pick up chance remarks about careers plans positively, and build dialogue about their future, this would encourage the development of self-confidence and self-determination in young people.

There was commentary from various participants that teachers' knowledge of post-school provision should be increased. Face-to-face meetings were advocated to improve the quality of information, but perhaps more significantly to improve the quality of relationship between school and post-school professionals.

Links between school and post-school providers

Personal acquaintance, as discussed previously, was considered necessary to good communication and this emerged as a major strand in the discussion of how to improve post-school links. One school teacher commented that the lack of a 'network' with post-school providers formed a barrier to good communication. He suggested that one improvement would be joint training activities to develop and support a local network of school and post-school providers. This would establish contact between services and allow professionals to get to know each other. Also, it would help address the problem college participants noted, that when teachers move on from transition support roles, they often do not get to know the new incumbents. A careers adviser pointed out that "there is no system in school for getting to know new staff" and this added weight to the idea that a 'network' would be an improvement. The teacher also suggested an e-group should follow, and "even young people can be involved in setting up the network too". To increase knowledge of college activities, information events for school staff were also suggested. Joint staff development was considered useful for supporting a network and could be set up, either on in-service days, or at twilight, or lunchtime sessions. A lecturer noted that college lecturers have time in June to liaise, when the college term has ended but schools are still in session. She added:

It's about everybody getting their timetables together and seeing when these visits, or observations or information sharing events could take place. It's definitely needed.

The idea of meeting "face-to-face" was mentioned by both school and college staff. One college lecturer said, "I would like the opportunity to get to know guidance teachers at schools." Another college lecturer suggested the face-to-face encounter needed to be informal if it is to be welcomed by professionals and effectively support inter-agency working:

If you meet socially, in a social network, people are motivated to actually say 'oh, I'll do that!', so that is why I think a socialised agenda is much better, to get the juices flowing so to speak.

Job shadowing

All college participants suggested that teachers should come in and see what went on in college, and teachers themselves all professed a desire to see more of college and get to know college staff. Job shadowing should be set up, they suggested, for teachers to develop an understanding of how partner services, particularly colleges, work. One college lecturer commented that transition goes well if there's a good working relationship. As well as knowing them personally, college staff would like teachers to be more familiar with their educational provision:

Maybe they could pick a subject relevant to their area and they could come up to college and just observe. I think it's important that teachers know what we can offer, rather than just have a name, and they've got to come here and see that and sample that.

Staff shadowing was suggested by a number of participants. One participant conceded he does very little face-to-face communication with school staff and added:

I don't think there is enough putting yourself in the other environment. Because we are not visiting each other, we have a tendency not to say things that somebody else could pick up.

The idea that personal contact allowed for ideas to be ‘picked up’ and used to support the transitions of young people was central to this idea of improvement. The careers advisers also saw the benefit in being “on the menu” for teachers at in-service days. They suggested a move onto new territory could also improve transition events. One career adviser described past good practice in partnership working that if used more generally could lead to improvement:

We actually had teachers into the Opportunity Centres. Instead of having a [transition] meeting in school, people were invited in here, because I bet you a lot of staff have never been in here.

They went on to agree that transition support would improve if transition meetings took place in opportunity centres, where job seeking materials were available and parents and carers could have a look round, “so they know career advisers don’t bite.” This they hoped would improve their relations with parents and carers.

Work experience

Amongst improvements suggested by pupil support assistants was the idea that young people should have “the opportunity to experience a more diverse range of work places, so that they can make a more informed choice [of career].” Work experience, built in to school provision as the Work Aware project, was the activity that was most highly rated by the young people in their structured interviews. There was provision in policy for up to fifteen days work experience while at school, if appropriate; but, a teacher noted, work placement opportunities were “not being maximised” at Beechbank High School. The training provider noted the salutary effects of work placement on some young people:

Put him, the achiever of the month, in the centre with his pals and he’s trouble, but put him out on a work placement with adults and there’s no problem whatsoever. Glowing reports! He’ll get a job.

A college lecturer suggested that career plans in the care sector should be supported by work experience in appropriate services while at school:

Work experience while at school which is appropriate to the planned career would be helpful. Some young people are attracted to care, for their own personal reasons, but are not realistic about what the job requires.

Other practical activities to support transition

As well as exploiting work experience to the full, early experience of college life was also discussed. When thinking of how to encourage young people to make the leap from school to college, one student participant said, “Give them a day’s shadowing.” Shadowing of college students by school pupils was discussed by most participants and viewed as a potentially worthwhile innovation. Where one careers adviser was wary that student shadowing “would be a bit of a skive”, college participants saw both the potential benefits and the practical difficulties in this proposal. One college lecturer initially thought shadowing would be disruptive to the work of students in college, but came round to seeing the benefits for the ‘shadowee’ in taking a responsible role. Shadowing of students at college was generally welcomed as a worthwhile pre-induction activity to help show young people the realities of college life.

The benefits of in-reach from college, though this did not happen within the school curriculum at present, were discussed and school participants suggested college personnel should come in to school to work with young people more regularly:

I think in-reach is a very important part of it. It’s what we need, and more of it. The more in-reach we have, the more the children are familiar with the people at the college, and the more the college people are seen as being accepted in school. And I think we really need that.

There were repeated pleas that more dovetailing of provision should take place and this was discussed as a potential improvement by all participants. Of Skills for Work activities, the participants’ data mainly concerned the practical difficulties of making the programme work between services, but there was no doubt that Skills for Work increased dovetailing between school and college, and, as such, was welcomed by participants. The improvement requested from a school perspective was that Skills for Work should not just be for the motivated student. The link course to college, for pupils

in departments of special education, was viewed as an example of good practice, but was available only due to a higher level of funding in college for pupils transferring from special education departments. As articulated by the educational psychologist, “college knows that funding will follow them”. Colleges were not perceived as having “bought in” to liaison with schools regarding transitions of mainstream learners and one teacher suggested that college staff should be invited into school to increase their feeling of “some kind of part ownership” of successful transitions.

Better post-school opportunities

The careers adviser had said “there’s nothing for them when they leave school,” and educational psychologists and college lecturers voiced concern at the lack of equity in school provision for non-academic youngsters at this stage. The flexible curriculum coordinator in school commented that there was:

. . . an ever-increasing gap in provision of appropriate courses, and the increasing numbers of winter leavers who have not accessed college courses, or found appropriate training from Careers Scotland. These are ‘missing’ pupils.

However, one college participant suggested college should link more closely with school:

If you’re talking about a genuine partnership, with genuine benefit to the school and the individual, we should be part of the timetable. We should be column seven, FE day. They could opt to come here and do a progression award over two years.

Two other college participants also saw potential improvement in closer links with schools. One noted that the head of his department wanted his staff teaching vocational groups in school in a form of ‘in-reach’ provision. A third participant suggested that school should offer pre-college courses in an effort to reduce the attrition rates in young college students. Amongst this commentary by college professionals was clear advocacy for improvement of provision between school and college through sharing space and joint working to deliver courses.

One final comment on improvement came from a college participant who was concerned to improve work based training. He spoke of the need to get small to medium sized enterprises, “who can be frightened or find it too much hassle,” interested in taking on apprentices. He suggested some intervention to address the problem of small employers not being able to take on apprentices, “When an apprentice is shadowing a time-served craftsman, he has to slow down to show him and to teach him, so it all costs money.” As well as financial incentives, the need for timely interventions and a good understanding of, and links with, partner providers was expressed by this last respondent. He had a keen awareness of deficiencies in provision, in both training and employment, for young people with additional support needs.

Conclusion

In this analysis of the experiences and perceptions of the professional environment where post-school transitions take place a number of barriers to improvement have been brought to light, including prevalent difficulties in partnership working to support transitions. Lack of time set aside for partnership working, poor communication routes and a propensity for teachers not to see their role as ‘key’ to activities beyond school have been the main barriers. Participants spoke of a lack of systems to identify young people, and difficulties in building close relationships to support post-school transitions. A sense of disconnection between school and post-school services has grown throughout the analysis. While a number of participants contributed ideas on potential improvements, discussion of leadership aimed to address obstacles to transition support was conspicuous by its absence from the data.

Chapter Four - Discussion

The purpose in this chapter is to consider how the perspective offered by this study enhances our knowledge and understanding of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs. This chapter offers a more analytic perspective on findings presented in the preceding chapter, drawing where appropriate on the literature. The process of relating ideas from the literature to the analysis of the findings within this study aims to locate it within a wider field of enquiry. In an effort to uncover taken-for-granted factors, the discussion will consider many of the cultural aspects of the research environment. The concepts of time-pressure in school, the way young people are constructed by professional participants, sensitivities about the categorisation of additional support needs and the call for college-like approaches in school will be considered. The perceptions and experiences of transition support given by various participants will offer some explanation of cultural factors influencing the process. In the light of this discussion, the chapter will go on to consider how school interconnects with post-school services, with a discussion of how personal information is transferred to post-school providers. Whether *careership* is developed and how young people are supported at this stage within their social environment, taking transformations of identity into account, will be considered as will the concept of social capital in the school. The commentary is constructed to portray potential improvements in the transition process. Specific examples of improvements are considered at various points, as are areas for further investigation. Recommendations arising from this commentary will be given in the concluding chapter.

Time-pressured environment

Broadly, the study found that dispositions and attitudes in professional participants occurred, to some degree, in response to their time-pressured work environment. By way of introducing this theme, it should be noted that the school adhered to a timetable containing a short registration period, followed by six periods per day, each for a different subject and each fifty-three minutes in length. This method of dividing up the day allowed for a daily diet of six different subjects, offering a varied challenge to young people at secondary school. Pupils moved from class to class six times a day, with rarely a double period, and in a school as large as Beechbank High School, the

journey to the new class could take as long as four or five minutes, depending on traffic conditions. For example, a short hold-up at the end of the art lesson might have obliged the home economics teacher, at the other end of the school, to start her lesson more than five minutes late. The timetable, coupled with the extended geography of the school, could produce a knock-on effect, exerting additional time pressure, especially for teachers in practical subjects. The culture of school, therefore, included a six-times-daily effort by teachers to re-establish calm and quickly create a peaceful and productive learning environment after the hurly-burly of period changeover. The school day exerted pressures of time as did the cyclical nature of the school year.

Participants across the study identified the lack of time for transition activities as a major concern. One educational psychologist in the study, having discussed the time-pressured responses of teachers and speaking of what needed to be done to facilitate outcomes for young people, said, “[we need] to ensure there is a calmness brought to all these interfaces” [where professionals communicate about next steps for young people]. He went on to describe how the daily pressure linked to longer cycles of pressure:

It’s a cycle. It is a cycle. It’s about getting kids through, particularly in fourth year, getting them through their exams, and then out. And people go, phew! That’s little Jimmy gone . . . and it starts again.

This commentary offered a view, given by an associated professional from a different background, suggesting schools are busy cyclical institutions where individual pupil identities, and their potential careers, were not as important as the process of ‘getting them through’. Teachers are imbued with this work-a-day cultural tradition, where the daily, termly and annual cycles in school are prime, the psychologist argued, and teachers are intent on getting young people ‘through’ school rather than focusing on what the future of the young person might be. This concern with timely school processes adversely affected the ability of teachers to develop the mindset where they could be proactive, creative, ‘for’ the pupil, future-orientated and understand themselves to be ‘key’ to successful transitions (Buchardt 2004).

The example above contained a perception of the time pressure teachers work under, that they are, ‘busy, busy, busy’, and began to offer an understanding of the hurried

demeanour and time-pressed disposition of some teachers, grown within and by the culture of school. It explained to some extent, although it did not counter, the criticism by the educational psychologist that, “teachers are not interested beyond the immediate environment of school.” Because teachers experienced pressure in their primary responsibilities to lead the learning in classes, and guidance teachers experienced pressure to liaise with families regarding the in-school success and failure of their pupils, they were unlikely to engage with activities to support post-school transitions. Therefore tasks such as communication and liaison with post-school partners were not prioritised. This would have comprised an ‘extension of their duties’ that teachers were too pressed to make (Rosenbaum 1999:241). Perhaps this experience of time pressure accounted to some extent for why teachers had felt able, according to the educational psychologist, to help themselves to a “free period” rather than participate in shared events with co-professionals. It went some way to explaining why teachers had behaved towards educational psychologists in ways described as “getting given the run-around.” The vestige of the autonomous professional, whose job required direct work with children and young people, and who was not part of a web or network of support services, persisted in this reported teacher behaviour. Added to the time-pressured, school-focused dispositions already described, this sense of professional autonomy indicated an attitude particularly inimical to the inter-agency working required to support post-school transitions.

Construction of young people

Another glimpse of the teacher-centred culture of the school was afforded by the college lecturer participants. As well as saying that transition information was at times misleading, two college lecturers noted that a significant number of transition forms were not signed by the young people to whom they pertained. This failure to follow fairly new systems, set up following the Beattie Report (1999), illuminated aspects of the construction of young people unhelpful to supporting post-school transition. The transition form had been created and implemented as a system to capture strengths and abilities, but also, perhaps more significantly, to impart information on additional support needs and support strategies to post-school providers. The central component of the process of gathering and agreeing information included consultation with the young person. According to policy, the young person should have authority over how their

personal information is framed. Also, their signature on the transition form confirms that they are agreeing to the transfer of this information to post-school providers. The lack of a signature meant that the young person had not given consent to personal information being passed on.

Yet the data indicated that guidance teachers at Beechbank High School had passed on unsigned transition forms to college. This omission could be explained superficially as, again, one aspect of a time-pressured culture; and one guidance teacher said that no matter how much information colleges get, “they’re never satisfied”. However, I would suggest that it pointed to the construction, by guidance teachers, of the young person not as the subject in his or her own life, on the point of transition to a new stage, but as an object in need of their, the guidance teacher’s attention (Griffin 1997; Benjamin 2002). The young person’s transition was constructed as an administrative task by the teacher and, in a number of cases, had been hastily executed, rather than being seen as an opportunity for consultation. An opportunity to transfer to the young person and post-school providers information about, or ‘signals’ of their value had not been exploited (Rosenbaum 1999:225). It also suggested that the guidance teacher, due to a school-focused disposition, lacking a wider perspective or critical reflection, did not see himself as a source of encouragement for the young person (MacDonald & Marsh 2005) or as a boundary person with influence in both school and post-school environments.

Aspects of this objectifying construction of young people were also discernible from teachers themselves as they considered the most useful way of supporting transition. In questionnaire responses, teachers did not rate activities and events aimed at young people as useful, and rated professional liaison more highly. This was at odds with the young participants’ views, and suggested that teachers were unlikely to notice or promote the young person’s voice in their own future planning process, called for by current policy. The stultifying effects of teachers preserving their professional discretion, at the expense of promoting self-advocacy in young people, were exposed here (Barton 1998; Riddell 2006). The construction of young people by teachers as in need of care, attention and professional guidance, rather than as independent individuals in the process of realising their own futures, added to the objectifying dynamic in teacher relations with pupils.

Further texture to this construction of young people was afforded by information generated by the study referring to the ‘cohort’ mentality of teachers, and the stretch that would be required of teachers to work on an individual basis to make post-school plans. Destinations were many and varied; some young people with additional support needs went to the supported college course, some to vocational college courses, a few to employment or training, and a significant number to no positive post-school destination at all. School teachers found it difficult to tailor their transition support activities to individuals. The school worked with groups as if they were progressing together, and teachers, even in personal and social education lessons where post-school plans were aired, worked with groups of around 25 to 30. Only two teachers in the study, the ones whose self-reflection was notable, spoke of creating dialogue, ceding power to the young person (Dolan & McGrath 2006) and working over time with individuals to plan for the future; in effect acknowledging the young person’s subjectivity. These two teachers understood the importance to successful transition, of good pupil teacher relations (Raffo & Reeves 2000). The more common construction, visible in the study, of young people as objects in need of guidance and administrative attention, as objects to be discussed with other professionals, to be seen as members of a cohort, was a factor giving rise to problems in implementation of policy to support post-school transition for young people with additional support needs. The way teachers perceived and related to young people, partly through unconscious disposition and attitude acquired in school, created a barrier to them helping young people effectively as they approached transition. I would suggest that a further enquiry into teachers’ construction of young people approaching transition might prove useful and this idea will be revisited in the concluding chapter.

Categories of additional support needs

The strand of data dealing with the categorisation of young people with additional support needs gave a broader understanding of the barriers to improvement in the professional environment. The study discovered that pupil support assistants and teachers concern themselves about ‘hidden’ needs that are difficult to identify. They also related evidence that described identification being made following friction occurring because of breaches of discipline. Parental pressure could at times be the impetus to identification of additional support needs, but two parents also noted that dyslexia had not been identified by the school despite them raising concerns. The

college, however, had later picked this up. One educational psychologist participant expressed disappointment that the school had not been proactive in identifying and supporting young people with disabilities and it had taken legislation to move schools on. So, although identification of different types of additional support needs was discussed, the study found no evidence of identification and categorisation of those young people without career plans and, therefore, the ones most liable to make an unproductive transition from school.

A critical friend, an educational psychologist, reacted against the early draft of the questionnaire, and in particular, strongly disliked a question about how professionals categorise young people with additional support needs. The reaction alerted me to a taken-for-granted aspect of the environment under investigation. Before attempting to account for what this situation had to demonstrate of the research environment, it might first be worth remembering that psychology has its roots, professionally and theoretically, in medicine not education. Historically, psychologists concerned themselves with traits and impairments inherent within individuals. The social model of disability, with origins in the domain of sociologists, has challenged this approach since it holds that disabling factors occur within the environment. My rather blunt effort to enquire into how participants categorised additional support needs touched a nerve with the educational psychologist. His construction of a young person at school was similar to that of a 'patient', and opening up any consideration of the 'condition' of a young person under his care to a wider group would not be ethical. The professional demeanour of the educational psychologist, retaining power and control through confidentiality, was at odds with the college perspective. The college transition coordinator discussed the need for 'hard' evidence, about category of support user (Davis 2004), cognitive ability, attainment and about exactly what support would be needed for a young person. This was at odds with the dreams and hopes that would be the subject of a person-centred planning meeting central to the educational psychologists approach to transition planning. Careers advisers, too, reacted against the person-centred approach, which focused on aspiration, since they prized more highly the practical skills of, for example, independent travel and good timekeeping, relevant to the world of work.

Information from pupil support assistants and teachers on "hidden" support needs arose as an aspect and indicator of a curriculum-centred culture at school. In an effort to

maintain momentum in teaching and learning in classrooms, teachers promoted an element of passivity and acceptance of learning materials in young people, for example through the classroom code of conduct – the rules, displayed in each classroom, setting out cooperative ways of behaving. Teachers were expected to deliver the curriculum efficiently and peaceably through the course of the school day, and on through the week and term. As a result of this habituated repetitive culture, learning difficulties that have not already been diagnosed as part of a specific impairment were not noticed by teachers. Pupils with poor motivation or low ability were unwilling to draw attention to their difficulties and saw themselves as to blame (Barry 2005). This accounted for some low-achieving pupils becoming the “quiet wee mouse at the back of the class”.

In a similar way, identification of additional support need that would take place following friction within the school system showed the school to be organizationally centred. If a pupil became unruly, or if parents complained vociferously, then identification of additional support needs would be likely, and support would then be directed towards the young person. This information supported the idea that the professional culture required, above concerns for individual learning needs, that the smooth running of the school was not interrupted, that the many were not interrupted by the needs of the few. Schools are concerned with attainment, and success in exams in particular, and this accounted for why systems for identifying and supporting those at risk of poor transition outcomes had not been proactively created or adopted. Beechbank High School’s improvement agenda ran counter to addressing this difficulty (Mittler 2000). In a similar but larger sphere, the educational psychologist’s view that schools have not been proactive about disability discrimination, and it had taken legislation to provoke changes, pointed to the concern that schools are likely to promote achievement and attainment for groups of young people rather than identify and address individual support needs.

College-like approaches

Teachers’ views on college-like approaches in school developed the picture of the hierarchy in the school environment. Comments were made on the possibility of changing the culture of the school and the two participants who addressed this directly gave the opinion that this would be successful only if the whole school staff and parents were behind the changes. There was a sense that participants were grappling with the

problems of inertia in the school, of residual systems that have lasted beyond the time they were needed, when social restrictions were harsher and employment opportunities for non-academic young people were more prevalent. An educational psychologist participant said he could foresee ‘massive benefits’ in the school adopting college-like approaches with seniors. He argued that the key difference for young people in college is that they feel they are respected and treated as adults, and went on to discuss how youngsters gauge what makes a good teacher through their firmness, discipline and control of the class.

One teacher, who had previously worked in a sixth form college, picked up on the idea of the benefits that occur for pupils through college-like approaches. He could see the benefit of increased participation and ownership of learning in young people in an environment where they were constructed as active participants in their own learning. However, he set this beside concerns about how attainment might be affected:

If a pupil’s pace is extremely slow, or if they find themselves going off the rails – we have to be careful we don’t lose people. It would be great if pupils are taking more control of their learning, but to be able to get to that, it is going to require a big culture change by teachers and pupils who are used to having everything chunked up, and put into subject areas and being chivvied for homework by their teacher.

The objective of offering a more respectful, participative learning environment for young people in their senior years at school would run aground on the shoal of a highly directive and demanding culture focusing on maximising exam pass successes. As one guidance teacher pointed out, changes giving more discretion to senior pupils “always seem to hit a snag” and parents complained. He suggested that cultural change is not easy to effect.

The disconnection between school and college or other post-school environments can be seen in the time-pressured atmosphere where partnership working was not a priority and teachers’ professional autonomy held sway. The construction of young people by school teachers, as members of a cohort who needed to be processed through school, could adversely affect their ability to support young people at this juncture. A reticence about

accounting for how additional support needs were identified and responded to indicated an unhelpful detachment at odds with the quest for hard information from college and careers. These ideas helped explain some of the taken-for-granted elements of school culture functioning as obstacles to improving post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs.

School-to-work networks and teacher-employer linkage

The professional environment in which post-school transitions take place has been the main area of investigation in this study. One component of that environment, the idea of *school-to-work networks and teacher-employer linkage* was an important thread in Rosenbaum's (1999) work and has generated a considerable amount of information in this study. This analysis will consider the evidence for, and effect of, professional control of post-school transition activities, the personal contact between professionals and the perceptions of barriers to good professional contacts being made and maintained. The references to this topic occurred mainly in the form of commentary by teachers and college lecturers about the difficulties in creating a trustful joined-up way of working to support transitions, and, as considered in the earlier discussion, of the lack of time for these 'extraneous' activities.

Despite direct questions on linkage, the study found no evidence of teacher-employer linkage. The data pertaining to school-to-college linkage portrayed a lack of knowledge amongst teachers of college personnel and practices, and vice-versa. Indeed, one teacher spoke of not knowing (and no-one in the pupil support department knowing) who the school's business partners were. This merits comparison with Rosenbaum's discussion of studies in Japan showing evidence of the benefits of school-to-work linkage for students in the bottom half of the class. The questionnaires in the early phase of the study recorded that most parents and young people gathered information about employment possibilities for themselves. Only two mentioned the careers adviser as helpful, and this raised the possibility that professional involvement in linkage with employers may have been marginal in many cases.

However, effective employer linkage, for the post-college transition, was discussed by a college lecturer in engineering when he was describing one example of progression from college:

Last year we lost, in inverted commas, nine Engineering Advantage students to Fortingale Fabricators who took them on as apprentices. The employer was happy with the skills content of the course, and we were able to provide them with a record of the students' attitude, timekeeping and personal organization.

This was one example of linkage based on trust where the employer was confident that the college was delivering the skills he would need in his apprentices. However, the engineering lecturer went on to explain his dissatisfaction with the majority of his college courses, which could not promise apprenticeships or employment opportunities at the end. He also noted the reluctance of small to medium-sized enterprises, a main type of employer in the region, to take on and train young people, saying this was a major hindrance for the college in the creation of productive employer linkage. Given the nature of the Scottish economy, reflected in the environment local to Beechbank High School, a question worthy of further investigation would be around how training opportunities for young people in small to medium-sized enterprises can be supported.

Information on the role of the Careers Service provided another perspective from which to consider how local school-to-work networks and teacher-employer linkage operated in practice. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that careers advisers gave the view that any direct link between school and training providers was a type of 'short circuit', and they warned against such practices. They said that links leading to young people transferring directly from school to a local training provider would pre-empt their role - that of providing impartial careers advice to young people about all possible options and supporting their next steps. They suggested that direct teacher-employer or training provider linkage would restrict practice, curb opportunity and would be less beneficial to the young person in the longer term. In his discussion of linkage between services, an educational psychologist gave his perspective on 'short circuits', suggesting that if staff from partner services become too friendly, then impartiality can go by the wayside.

Careers advisers also argued, particularly in the case of young people with additional support needs, that a direct transition from school to employment was unlikely due to their lack of suitable skills. The training provider similarly evidenced the undesirability, from a Careers Service perspective, of a 'short circuit'. Following their advert in the local press, for young people to take up training places, the training provider had found the relationship with Careers strained. Careers advisers expect, and are required in policy, to oversee post-school transitions, and this militates against promotion of teacher-employer linkage or direct routes from school into training. Policy in Scotland seeks to maintain impartiality in careers advice and equity in training provision, but in so doing may be impartial to the extent that it is not sufficiently helpful to those who need extra support. The need to uphold impartiality may be the type of 'dangerous fiction' that allows inequality to continue (Benjamin 2002). Crucial work in relaying 'trusted signals of youth's value' has been placed in the hands of careers advisers, a profession at one remove, without day-to-day knowledge of the young people in question, to whom the young people are unlikely to self-refer, and without effective links to the teachers and parents who do know them well. So, while careers advisers warn against direct linkage between school and employers, is this advice given in the interest of young people with low academic attainment, the 'intellectually subordinate', or is it an attempt by professionals to secure their position in transition 'territory'?

Teachers rated liaison between professionals as more important in supporting transitions than activities and events directed at the young people themselves. Teachers, it seems, held sway, alongside careers advisers, in post-school transition territory, and they viewed their activities to support transition, alongside other professionals, as of greater benefit than one-off events and activities for young people. However, the significant weight of evidence the teachers gave about lack of time for post-school transition work and difficulties in communication with post-school partners raised concern about how to achieve good liaison. How to create links and networks within the current set-up was addressed by professional participants from various backgrounds. Time and the support of senior managers were considered necessary to create school-to-work networks and teacher-employer linkage. Teachers and lecturers spoke forcefully about the lack of time within their working week for this type of capacity building. For some teachers the problem cut deeper than simple lack of time:

I think we need not just to set aside time, but we need to be able to establish systems of working [tapping the table for emphasis] so that things are ingrained and happen without thought.

The teacher at this juncture in the discussion was waking up to, and becoming conscious of a lack of taken-for-granted, “ingrained” systems to support transition. The culture of the school was at odds with activities needed to support transitions of young people with additional support needs. Planned approaches for young people with additional support had to be worked up from the ground each time and in ‘ad hoc’ ways.

After commenting on the lack of time, some respondents went on to explain difficulties in more detail. College participants showed they were aware of the difficulty that entering another professional territory can cause, “People can be protective of their zones”. A later comment by the same participant typified such territorial attitudes:

College staff can be critical of schools because of ‘failed’ children. People tend to blame the previous service.

It seemed that time was only one factor preventing good linkage. The above quotation indicated that a lack of trust and respect between services were also at issue and that relationships needed to be restructured as a starting point for successful partnerships (McGinty & Fish 1992). Trust, a foundation stone in school-to-work networks, can best be achieved between individuals in partner services through long-term relationships, and the willingness of individuals to hand on relationships to new staff members (Rosenbaum 1999). Participants from all sectors went on to make suggestions to improve their way of working. So although the data reflected a sense of exasperation amongst professionals about problems in school-to-work networks and linkage, they also captured a strand of positive discussion in which most respondents were espousing improvements in transition practice.

The range of possible post-school destinations, causing the cohort to fragment, should be considered alongside the fact that, at 16 years, the statutory provision for young people’s education terminates. At this juncture the inherent structural difficulties young people

experience at transition are exposed as they move from the 'safety' of education to attempting to find their place in a market economy. In this study most of the young participants had elected to complete their time of statutory education at college rather than return to Beechbank High School for a final term. However, even within this apparently coherent group there were great differences in destination. Individuals elected to follow courses either in engineering, hospitality, care or construction. Each course was managed by a separate faculty within Central College on 3 different campuses and each displayed diverse cultures and practices.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that one teacher respondent explained how useful he found personal contact during primary school liaison activities to be. However, at the post-school transition, colleges are not required to 'buy in' to linkage in the same way or to the same extent, he claimed. As well as a lack of college staff reaching in to school to facilitate transition, there was evidence in the study of college lecturers believing in the efficacy of the 'clean slate' approach to new students, allowing for transformations in identity in the new environment. A lecturer in construction said:

Well to be perfectly honest, what we try to do is give them a clear cut-off.

The first thing we say to them is 'This is not school. This is the next phase'.

This laissez-faire approach to transition, used as a means of drawing out a more mature response in students, was evident in the lecturer in construction's attitude.

This scenario occurred alongside evidence about extensive support given by college professionals from two other college faculties to young people transferring from departments of special education and through sensory support services. Here a tailor-made approach to transition was created with plenty of opportunity for information gathering and visits to plan for transfer. These two opposing scenarios for transition support demonstrated the disparity in support for youngsters who have a known and visible learning difficulty or disability when they leave school compared to those with, say, social and emotional difficulties who are likely to be expected to 'sink or swim'. Ward and Thomson's findings (1997:140), that the 'unrecorded' group fared badly, continued to be evident in this study. Questions regarding equity in transition support services provided for young people with differing additional support needs and concerns

about the nature of support and how and when it will be provided deserve further investigation.

While teachers spoke of a lack of personal contact with post-school providers, of having no links whatsoever with employers or training providers, and having no knowledge of the school's business partners, careers advisers talked about the difficulty of liaising effectively with teachers. When responding to questions on how they networked with others, much of the evidence from careers advisers concerned communication difficulties with teachers. They noted that face-to-face meetings were infrequent due to three factors: teachers were often not available because they were in class; the geography of the school meant guidance teachers were scattered and hard to find; and large numbers of teachers were involved with each leavers group. Educational psychologists spoke of school as being reactive, not proactive or calm, and of school teachers not understanding the pressures in partner organizations. One psychologist said that, in the past, post-school support partnerships had foundered because teachers had not known how to make use of what partners were offering, and since nothing productive was happening, they had drifted away.

Ideas for improvements to school-to-work networks and teacher-employer linkage occurred throughout the data. A pupil support assistant suggested that a post-school liaison officer, with up-to-date information about local opportunities should be appointed for the school. There was evidence from the *Inclusiveness Projects*, discussed in the *Introduction*, that the appointment of a transitions coordinator could be a step forward. This potential for improvement also occurred in teacher discussions. When this idea was reflected to the educational psychologists, however, they expressed concern that appointing a key person in school for transition support might well be unsuitable for the young people concerned. In the educational psychologists' view young people need a secure and trusting relationship within which to make plans for the future, and are unlikely to respond well to the help of a new person with whom they have no prior relationship. This dilemma, about whether the appointment of specific transition support personnel would effect improvement, merits further consideration and investigation.

Teachers and college lecturers suggested sharing training and staff development opportunities in twilight sessions where co-professionals could collaborate to improve support for post-school transitions. Careers advisers noted that they would like to be 'on the menu' at school inset days, and the training provider suggested coming in to school to explain *Get Ready for Work* to teachers. So, although the evidence in the study was that joint activities and good linkage were rare and hard to achieve, participants from all professional services produced suggestions to address this difficulty. The extent to which organizations involved in post-school transitions were prepared to value and then divert resources into nurturing good links with partners would merit further investigation. As suggested in the evaluation of the *Inclusiveness Projects*, efforts at a strategic level would be needed and implementation carefully planned before operational links could be effective.

'Trusted signals of youth's value'

The idea of creating valuing relationships and passing on 'trusted signals of youth's value,' (Rosenbaum 1999:235), was referred to by a number of participants and occurred particularly in the teacher and college lecturer interviews. The first step in this activity, to acknowledge a young person's strength and discuss with them, so they begin to understand the value employers are likely to place on their skills, was discussed in some interviews. However, the next step, the idea of signalling 'youth's value' to post-school providers and employers appeared mainly as negative commentary. Teachers talked of their belief that colleges were never satisfied with the personal information they gave them at transition, and college lecturers noted that school information could be seriously misleading. It has been noted that college lecturers also suggested that unsigned transition forms indicated that the opportunity to relay perceptions of strengths and value, as well as discuss support needs, had not been exploited by the guidance teacher. The study found little evidence that youth's value, in the group of leavers in question, was either acknowledged or signalled effectively by school teachers to post-school providers. Although not a comparative investigation, this finding is at odds with evidence about support given by guidance teachers helping with personal statements of young people's transitions to Higher Education. Issues of social justice and equality, of a lack of parity between academic and non-academic young people are visible here (Gewirtz 2006). This suggested that the question of the relevance, usefulness and indeed parity of the personal information offered to post-school providers, raised by Ward &

Thomson (1997) continues to be of concern. The policy and strategy on information sharing may need further consideration if this ‘information gap’ between school and post-school is to be bridged, and Scottish students in the bottom half of the class are to begin to see the point, as their Japanese counterparts have done, in seeking success at school (Rosenbaum 1999).

Some participants, and much of the literature, (Pilling 1990, Furlong & Cartmel 2007, Henderson et al 2007), acknowledged that it was local social and economic conditions which led to poor transition outcomes, rather than the quality of information on the personal attributes of individual young people. In this regard, this study contained a perception by participants that there was a disjunction, a gap, between education and employment. This was most evident in discussion, with both the careers adviser and training provider, on the recent reductions in training opportunities locally and an ongoing lack of work opportunities for young people. There was a sense of inevitability, echoing the literature (Banks et al 1992), in the poor progressions of young people with low educational attainment and from families who weren’t able to provide help into employment opportunities. The state of the local economy and jobs market lies beyond the direct influence of schools, but how information about this crucial component of post-school transition could be shared with schools and partners merits consideration. Similarly, there is an argument for government services which deal with employment, training and job creation receiving information from schools and partners about the training needs of the young people in their area. A two-way information flow on local economic conditions and opportunities could begin to build the context within which trusted signals of youth’s value could be exchanged.

In the discussion of their guidance work with young people approaching transition, two of the teacher participants spoke of their work in a way which revealed that they understood their relationship with the young person to be ‘key’ (Buchardt 2004). In this strand of evidence we glimpsed a dynamic within the teacher-pupil relationship where the young person was encouraged to take the lead. This was similar to the radical attitude to the young person, where prizing and valuing were established, described by Griffin (1997). One teacher said he experienced this as a “more equal” relationship, and achieving this was “the key to the whole process”. Acknowledgement by teachers of the pressures experienced by young people, especially peer pressure, revealed sensitivity

about the barriers and difficulties experienced at transition. Some teaching professionals in the study, spoke about developing a more equal relationship with young people, while continuing in a nurturing and protective role. They achieved a delicate balance, showing value for the young person and respecting them as adults, while still offering some form of protection. For example, a college lecturer spoke of being tough on young people and then “making it [college] really easy for them”, so that young people quickly experienced success, gained in self-confidence and developed a sense of self-worth and value. Another college lecturer spoke of the small class sizes for winter leavers in her faculty, which gave the opportunity for enhanced guidance and getting to know the students well. A lecturer from construction spoke of the students’ charitable fund-raising venture, part of their citizenship education, which made him value and appreciate his class of winter leavers and bucked the popular media construction of young people of low educational attainment as ne’er-do-wells.

However the study produced a greater weight of ideas suggesting that teachers did not generally support career aspiration. Educational psychologists and college lecturers were critical of teachers’ reluctance to support young people in their sometimes naïve and untried career aspirations. For example, one guidance teacher discussed how he steered a young person away from pursuing his intended career as a plumber:

. . . that was totally unrealistic – the competition for jobs in building skills, training, apprenticeships now is very high indeed.

Effectively he “burst this young person’s bubble”, discouraged him and showed that he anticipated this young person’s poor progression (MacDonald & Marsh 2005). Teachers do not always ‘get behind’ young people’s career aspirations. Buchardt’s (2004) views about under-expectation by teachers contributing to negative experiences for young people are borne out here. The teacher here had positioned the young person in a way that reduced his ability to act on his own behalf and reduced his personal dynamism. Whether a lack of valuing and an unwillingness, or inability, to make positive comments to young people about their career potential and failure to pass these on to post-school providers, leads to erosion of high aspirations, and creates a barrier to positive transitions, would be a valid question for further investigation.

Careership, based on self-confidence in interactions with others

In discussing *careership*, a pragmatically rational approach to career planning as described by Hodkinson et al (1996), I will consider one aspect of personal agency in young people at transition. This is whether the person has the confidence to weigh up factors affecting their life, and through a pragmatically rational process, decide on a course of action and put it into progress. Developing this self-confidence and self-determination can counter-balance disadvantage (Gilligan 2001) and has emerged as one factor influencing the success of post-school transitions. A substantial amount of data in this study referred or alluded to self-efficacy and to the social structures promoting or, more frequently, inhibiting it. I will offer a consideration of this aspect of personal agency, its promoters and its inhibitors, taking into account the views of young people themselves, but, in an effort to focus on the professional environment, will give prominence to the professional views. Concerns about a lack of self-determination in young people, and explanations for this, will serve as a conclusion to this strand.

The data gleaned directly from young people contained information which pointed to a greater sense of their own self-worth following transition. Young college participants discussed their pleasure at calling college lecturers by their first names, and in so doing, removing one trapping of unequal power relations in the teacher–learner relationship. They said they were appreciative of a freer learning environment where they could experience education alongside adults. The same young people expressed a willingness to go back to school and encourage pupils, a year younger than themselves, who might be unconfident, to make the leap to college. Their readiness to encourage others, and to advise me that fun events would encourage young people to “think a bit” and take the next step from school, suggested that they were finding their voice and developing in self-confidence and self-determination. By contrast, one boy in fifth year who had originally planned to leave, but then decided to stay on at school, displayed a personal disposition that went against the grain of the school. He complained that he was made to attend classes at school that he found boring and had no interest in achieving. He suggested that fifth year pupils should only have to complete courses of study that genuinely interested them, without the threat of being thrown out of school. Similar ideas occurred in evidence from professionals across the piece – that some young people are bored by school, have had enough of school, and some just want out of school but

have not planned what to do next. Taken together, these ideas suggest that staying on at school, for some young people, prolonged their disempowerment, delayed the onset of adulthood and simply put off the next step in their careers. This commonly held view poses questions about how to make the curriculum for non-academic senior pupils relevant, or whether another provision should be made.

One teacher regretted the lack of outdoor activities at Beechbank High School, since he knew from previous experience that this was a means by which to develop self-confidence, a sense of personal responsibility and self-determination in young people through immersion in new relationships not bounded by the usual rules and norms of the school. In this comment we glimpsed some of the restrictiveness of teacher–pupil relationships in the school environment and could comprehend the sometimes stultifying effects for young people of continuing in school-based relationships. The college lecturer participants spoke of the importance of making sure that young people get their hands dirty, of their demand for active, involved learning from young people and the importance of ascertaining their career motivation before recruitment to college courses. Personal motivation is of prime concern to those involved in adult education, since learners without motivation may founder and withdraw from courses, and this, ultimately, would have major repercussions for the college. In identifying, accessing and developing their own motivation, young learners engage in individuation. This process of developing motivation in the individual is one of the foundations of the college's function of taking forward an individual's vocational education. It is through such a process of pragmatic rationalisation that transformations of identity and maturation may occur (Hodkinson et al 1996).

Professional participants spoke about personal development in the young learners they worked with. The college senior lecturer in engineering spoke about the purpose of education as being a process of helping young people to develop socially, physically and emotionally. Although he spoke of the college ethos to meet the needs of industry, he emphasised the importance of personal development as a component of college education. The college lecturer in construction weighed the purpose of college education in the balance, whether it was about developing the individual, or serving the needs of industry, and in so doing, he signalled his awareness of differing models of education that college courses straddle. This poses the question, were young people

being positioned by college to develop themselves as self-confident, self-determining adults, or as ‘fodder’ for industry? The development of motivation in individual learners was given as the purpose and hoped for result of reduced support on entering a college course in construction; a sink or swim ethos that would stand them in good stead in the uncompromising construction industry. The college was positioning young people as in need of developing their own adult identity, so that they would be better able to defend themselves from the ravages of a depressed economic environment.

The study found no follow-through of support from pupil support assistants for young learners with social and emotional support needs on entry to full time college, (and only one case of pupil support assistant support for an S4 pupil accessing Skills for Work one session per week). A guidance teacher described this withdrawal of support, on entrance to college, as ‘cold turkey’ and said it had to happen sooner or later. A college lecturer commented that this is no longer ‘the nanny state . . . this is the next bit’. Both of the images contained in these comments are unflattering to school systems of support, one likening them to an addictive drug with consequences for withdrawal; the other to an infantilising relationship incurring and promoting dependence in young people. Both of these images emphasise the professional view that there is a suppression of self-reliance, one aspect of agency, inherent in school support systems, and there may be a need for young people to break out of a dependent mind-set on leaving school. This idea of breaking out of a mind-set can be viewed alongside college lecturers’ discussion about their practice of looking at young people with fresh eyes, not taking on prejudices but accepting young people as they were. The training provider, too, spoke of negative information regarding an assault remaining attached to a young person long after the event occasioning it. This participant, like the college lecturer, was keen that the young person should break away from the negative influence of his past and begin the process of constructing his adult identity. In this commentary, personal information about young people’s needs was seen in a negative light. There was no evidence of strong trustful relationships between professionals and families to produce integrated approaches to assessment or useful partnerships to support transitions (Davis 2011).

This discussion has shown that different expectations regarding self-determination in young people were promoted by post-school education and training providers. However, it is worth also considering the data alluding to differing power structures in

college. Participants across the piece made the point that college systems of discipline were harsh, and breaches of discipline would quickly lead to students being expelled. For example, because of the assortment of young people under 16 years of age from various communities, one participant noted that issues from the street were sometimes brought into college with negative consequences for discipline and the learning environment. Problems of this sort had led to students being expelled. So, although college seemed a freer learning environment, one which required and promoted increased personal responsibility in young people, it also contained the safe-guard, not available to schools, of removing 'unsuitable' students through expulsion. Colleges, since they are not part of the statutory education provision, operate within a different power structure – one more similar to the world of work.

Most of the evidence about a lack of self-determination in young people came from those professionals who work with young people before they leave school; from school teachers, careers advisers and educational psychologists. The careers advisers gave the most succinct appraisal of young people lacking self-determination in their comment that they “do not self-refer” to the careers service for advice and guidance and they “do not put things in motion themselves” regarding their post-school transitions since they were “unprepared” to do so. The careers advisers’ view was that many of the less able, less mature young people put their “head in the sand” as they approached post-school transition. Set beside this view, it is worth noting that the study found little evidence of *careership* training for young people at school. There was evidence of hasty efforts by Beechbank High School to fill this gap with last-minute, extra input from the careers service for Christmas leavers. There was also evidence of very low career expectation by a number of young participants and one young looked-after participant in particular. Educational psychologists expressed the opinion that pupils may not be respected in school and their views and plans may not be listened to, echoing the view from the literature on ‘intellectual subordination’ (Benjamin 2003) that occurs for young people not able to achieve high academic awards. One college participant noted that for those less academic, less motivated youngsters, school teachers assumed that their post-school destination was bound to be college. She believed that school pupils were parcelled off to college without any career planning when they “no longer fit the bill” at school. Her concern that no exit guidance was offered to young people as they prepared to leave

school highlighted the missed opportunities in school for working on self-confidence and self-efficacy in young people with additional support needs.

This section has considered the evidence from young people noting self-confidence and voice amongst those at college. Professional views, particularly that a modicum of self-determination and self-confidence is intrinsic to success at college, have been discussed. Some possible causes, originating within school systems and structures, given by professionals for young people lacking the confidence to act on their own behalf, have been outlined. The next section considers professional views about how to address issues of confidence in young people, and goes on to mark how these suggestions relate to a notion that transition is the time for professionals to facilitate and promote transformations of identity in young people.

Transformations of identity

Where college lecturers could see the benefits of a clear cut-off from the supported culture of school as a means of prompting a more self-possessed approach to learning and career planning, educational psychologists argued for a ‘toe in both camps’ transition from one culture, school, to the next, college or training, allowing the young person time to get used to new systems and discuss future arrangements with trusted key teachers whom they have known for a long time. Pupil support assistants also advocated a ‘soft start’ at college with support from school staff continuing for a limited time at the beginning of their college course. The study found evidence of the ‘toe in both camps’ and the ‘soft start’ models of transition being employed for youngsters progressing from departments of special education and for those with physical and sensory impairments, but not for any youngsters from Beechbank High School. This suggested that only young people with a clear categorization of mild or moderate learning difficulties or physical impairments could expect a transition supported by staff allocated to work directly with them to integrate them into the new environment.

College lecturers discussed their methods of easing youngsters into the new environment of college, and described what they did to aid personal development in the new student. One spoke of giving support without ‘crowding’ the young person and respecting their need to be seen to be treated the same as their peers. Evidence of how college used senior students to help support newcomers in practical sessions suggested an approach to

transition support where the lecturer was at one remove. Exemplars of past students' written work were deployed to develop confidence in what was required, again without using direct teacher intervention. These approaches were aimed to help with acculturation into the new learning environment without the direct use of support personnel. Team-building activities were also used to develop confidence, self-worth and a sense of belonging in the group of new learners at college. Systems of support relying on peers were likely to promote a growth in self-reliance. The college approach was, in general, more flexible, more inclusive and less likely to result in the isolation of a young person with additional support needs in the 'internal exile' experienced in a bubble of individual personal support (Brisenden 1992).

This review of the evidence shows that educational psychologists and pupil support assistants favour personal support to fill a perceived gap in support at transition which they consider useful to young people with pronounced additional support needs. Both pupil support assistants and psychologists work with individual students, getting to know them and their needs very well, and rarely work with groups. College based participants seem to favour approaches to support for young people with additional support needs that rely more on invisible methods, where support was strategically provided without the individual being 'singled out for treatment', group approaches and those where other learners were involved in building a group or team identity. It could be argued that the personal support approach, which seeks to integrate learners into a new environment through mediating and navigating for them, means these young people persist in juvenile relationships and ways of being, and lose the opportunity to experience a transformation of identity that could be occasioned by unimpeded interactions with a new group of peers. College approaches, relying more on group approaches, it could be argued allow more freedom and more opportunity for the young person to develop personally and therefore the possibility that a transformation of identity may occur.

A harsh economic climate: social capital

Social capital can help to secure families, individuals and groups in communities by creating support structures, links and stepping stones to the goods of society. In this way social capital can help to ameliorate and repair the social fragmentation caused by social and economic difficulties leading to unemployment and social exclusion. As Holland,

McGrellis et al (2007) discuss, community networks build trust and co-operation for mutual benefit, and these can only be achieved through investment strategies. Views of the local economy and employment prospects, as expressed by professional participants in this study, alongside the perspective of family participants and information about professional partnerships, can help us discern the effect of the school's sparse social capital.

The economic environment, unfavourable to employment and training opportunities for young people, was discussed by a number of participants with, notably, a careers adviser, who had up-to-date knowledge of local opportunities, stating:

That's our big beef. There's nothing for them when they leave school – even less that there was twelve months ago.

The economic and employment environment was considered to be a strongly negative factor for young people with additional support needs leaving the sheltered environment of compulsory education and entering the world of work. Looking ahead, future prospects for young people were diminishing, according to the careers adviser. School teacher participants displayed a most meagre knowledge of local business and employment opportunities. Also, the observation that college “can pick and choose” who to recruit left those with additional support needs with less favourable prospects (Banks et al 1992; Morrow & Richards 1996). The study found that colleges were unlikely to enrol young people with additional support needs, especially if of a social emotional and behavioural nature, unless additional funding followed them. A lack of parity in part-time and school-link places was discovered. Since Beechbank High School had no department of special education, there were no places for Beechbank pupils on link courses to the special programmes department in college. (I put this to the college transitions manager and she confirmed that historically she had provided supported transitions for pupils from departments of special education. With the presumption of mainstreaming for young people with additional support needs, she conceded that this method of allocating places was anachronistic. Since then, one Beechbank pupil has attended the link course.)

As well as finding evidence of economic constraint, few college or training places and a lack of job opportunity, the study confirmed the gap in post-school provision occasioned by a lack of school strategies for interaction with the local business and economic community. In common with views in the literature, it was evident that families were bearing the brunt of supporting young people, that it was the social capital of the family that came into play at transition (Morrow & Richard, 1996; Henderson, McGrellis et al, 2007). The young participants in the study indicated that they had relied on themselves and their family to help during post-school transition. The majority of parents and carers said that they had found information out for themselves and only two of the eleven interviewed had spoken to a professional for advice at this time. The study also found that family background and processes of early socialization influenced the choice of vocation (Allat 1993). One participant chose a course in care after years of helping her mother look after a disabled sibling. She said she chose a career in care because she would be able to bring an understanding of the family's point of view to her work. Another young participant was following in his brother's footsteps since he would help him find work in the travel and tourism business on completion of his college hospitality course. In these examples, this study upheld the concept that pragmatically rational *careership* in young people, which takes family influence and opportunity into consideration, was one of the driving forces behind successful transitions and that professional support was not interconnected effectively with families in this regard.

As well as beginning to develop a connection to families and a network of external links for the school, investment in its social capital would depend on developing ideas and dispositions within individuals so they are amenable and receptive to support mechanisms. One college participant spoke about the best way to prepare young people for transition. She suggested school teachers should find out about college ways of working and subtly relay the details to the young people while they are still at school:

Even if it [information about college systems] is just dropped in a conversation two or three times, it might well be that this would help give them an idea of what we do.

This type of approach could work well with the on-going dialogue considered best practice when preparing pupils for post-school transition. A sound knowledge of post-

school providers' ways of working is needed for this individualised and sensitive procedure to be effective. The mental barrier presented by an unfamiliar environment was evident in the young participants who were afraid to travel independently to college, and support for independent travel was provided in an ad hoc way. The study found little evidence of teachers working to develop young people's receptivity to new environments, working on their dispositions in an effort to prepare young people for transition.

In the main, the study found little evidence of investment strategies by professionals to build a network. In fact it was notable by its absence. A greater weight of data occurred around teachers not seeing the development of relationships beyond school as part of their job, of the time-pressured, territorial and, at times, irritable culture in school, inimical to inter-agency working on 'non-essential' tasks. Formal interagency meetings were viewed as onerous. Negative commentary about the school's failure to meet the needs of the less able young people occurred in data from college participants, the training provider and educational psychologists. Work experience opportunities in diverse placements were called for, for those young people who needed them, and the study found no examples of either students or professionals shadowing their counterparts to develop their knowledge and understanding of partner services. Taken together, this amounted to a sense that, as regards the post-school transition of young people with additional support needs, Beechbank High School was not held in high regard, was isolated to some extent from local partners, and work had not been done to develop the social capital of the school.

In conclusion

The analysis has traced themes and ideas from the literature through the research data and has confirmed certain themes as being of most relevance when looking to create improvements in post-school support systems. Considerable barriers to professional linkage have been discovered, partly through time and organisational pressures, putting difficulty in the way of face-to-face interactions between professionals from partner services. Thus, despite the reliance in policy on partnership working, the shared ground where inclusive post-school transitions could take place has not been sufficiently prepared.

Teacher attitudes and not seeing themselves as boundary persons who are 'key' to the process also created a barrier to transition support. Teachers' construction of young people, tending to view them as members of a cohort to be acted upon, rather than as individuals in the process of developing self-confidence and self-determination, was a significant influence in maintaining the status quo. There was a little evidence from two participants that teachers and professional partners do work with young people to create and support career aspiration. In the main, however, teachers did not display positive attitudes towards extending their duties to support post-school transitions.

The operational role of the careers service in post-school transitions has effectively driven a wedge between schools and employers and trainers. For example, training providers do not see school transition forms, containing personal support information on young people, but receive an action plan from the careers service. Due to a lack of a professional network there was no effective medium in which, 'trusted signals of youth's value' could be exchanged and colleges complained of poor quality transition information from school. There were few examples of the school seeking to improve its inter-connectedness or to prepare young people for transition. Unaddressed low career aspirations in young people, inequalities and deficits in their social capital which were not ameliorated by any school systems, also created difficulties in the post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs.

The ingrained culture of the school has proved perhaps the greatest obstacle to change and improvement. Teachers were found to be time-pressured and, to some degree, insular professionals. Their objectifying construction of young people and lack of systems to identify those at risk of making poor transitions have acted as barriers to improving practice. The difficulty of obtaining more participative approaches, because of the culture of the school, suggests that multi-faceted coordinated efforts will be required to make changes and improvements in transition support.

Conclusion

This study has aimed to increase our understanding of the professional environment where post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs take place, and to offer an explanation of the provenance of difficulties that were seen to arise and may contribute to social exclusion. Throughout, its aim has been to identify potential improvements. During the later stages of the study Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* has emerged as, potentially, some part of an explanation of the taken-for-granted aspects of school culture impacting on post-school transitions. It may be that background components of the professional environment, in particular attitudes and demeanours which persist in the minds of teachers and anachronistic ways of working that are embedded in school systems, could be better understood when viewed through the lens of *habitus*. Further investigation of the research environment, utilising *habitus* as an organizing idea and analytic tool, could help to deepen our understanding of post-school transitions (Reay 2004). However, this study has been limited to considering the effect of professional demeanour and attitude on the transition process as it emerged in the data gathered. The helpful construction of young people, by teachers and co-professionals, has been found to be a significant factor in transition support since it can aid the development of confidence, self-advocacy and *careership* skills in school leavers. Preparation of the ground for partnership working has also comprised a main concern in creating successful transition support.

Professional demeanour and attitude

The professional demeanour and attitude of teacher participants generally did not include a perspective where they considered the successful destinations of non-academic pupils to be a priority. Teachers were caught up in the 'busy-ness' of school, the primary tasks of providing an orderly learning environment culminating in the presentation of young people in external exams. Guidance teachers in particular had large case-loads and were pressed for time due to school-based attainment and pastoral matters. The outlook of teacher participants was generally school-centred, not concerned with the future for young people beyond school and revolved around concepts of improving attainment in school. Because of these internal organizational pressures, teachers were not at liberty, nor had they systems or leadership to develop a future-

oriented approach to young people with additional support needs. This study, looking at the day to day work of teachers has helped to explain why activities which are extraneous to the immediate concerns of the school do not carry the same weight as those concurring with the school's primary task of raising attainment. Lacking the leadership to advance thinking, broaden their perspective and make changes to outlook and attitude, teachers and other professionals did not manage to 'extend their duties', as implied in policy, to support transitions. This investigation of the culture of school and partner services has allowed us to appreciate why policies to support post-school transitions have failed to gain purchase in school and have been largely ineffective.

Information gathering and referral to post-school providers, an essential aspect of transition support, was found often to be incomplete and most frequently viewed as an administration task, rather than an opportunity to develop the relationship with the young person to support his / her transition. When asked about other details of transition activities and systems of support for non-academic youngsters, teachers struggled to account for what was going on. One participant reacted as if jolted awake by the realization that there were few systems in place, no unconscious ways of working, i.e. no aspects of school culture benefiting the support of post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs. In this respect the school-focused attitude of teachers and the territorial demeanour of associated professionals contributed to a noted difficulty in producing successful transitions. The evidence in this study suggests that the professional environment does contribute to perpetuating social exclusion and improvements in school systems to support transitions is identified as an area for action towards improvement.

Construction of young people

The study produces varying constructions of young people by the professional participants. Some presented them as subjects on the brink of taking their next step in life, and effective support for transition was possible in this construction. This view was held by two participants who were notable for their self-reflection and interest in seeking to improve transition outcomes for young people. Other more frequent constructions of young people presented an obstacle. Young people with additional support needs tended to be viewed as members of a cohort, a chore, badly behaved, immature and unlikely to do well post-school, as unsuitable for apprenticeships since training places were few and

other more reliable youngsters who had achieved more at school should get these places. In short, in this construction there seemed to be a tacit acceptance that an 'underclass' existed and that these 'intellectually subordinate' young people were destined to take their place in it. There would be little point in professionals working to counteract this process, since the productive places in society depended on merit in individuals and would therefore not be available to these youngsters.

Perhaps this construction could be explained by the fact that the study found that few professional participants had in-depth knowledge of the young people with whom they were working. No formal identification system was used to find and support those young people at risk of making poor transitions and who would need extra input at this stage. Professional participants lacked time and opportunity to engage with young people and build relationships to help plan and prepare for the future. As a result, professionals generally did not help to create and support career aspirations in young people. There was also little evidence that professionals understood themselves to be 'key' to the process. By and large their potential role in creating the future success of young people with additional support needs was not acknowledged by participants. An understanding of the benefit of identifying and assessing *youth's value*, and reflecting this to the young people themselves and to post-school partners, was largely absent from the study. Opportunities for teachers to reflect on and develop their construction of and relationship with young people could help off-set the unhelpful effects of meritocratic views when attempting to nurture aspiration in young people with additional support needs.

The family was found, in common with the views in the literature, to be the main source of advice and guidance for young people approaching transition. Yet teachers, careers advisers and other post-school providers were connected with only a few families - those of young people with co-ordinated or integrated support plans. These planning processes ensured a transition meeting. However, even these few meetings were found to be concerned with school-based attainment, to revolve round person-centred planning, to lack integrated approaches and were likely to be considered off target by post-school partners. For families of youngsters not on support plans, there was no built-in meeting with careers advisers, and professional support in general was not inter-connected with them. An area for improvement in post-school transition support, therefore, is the timely identification of young people at risk of poor transitions, so that relationships can be

built where integrated support can be brought to bear. In addition, this would be aided if information on the post-school destinations of non-academic school-leavers were given the same public prominence by education service managers as the school's external exam pass rates. By re-focusing concern onto the progressions of non-academic youngsters, teachers and partner professionals would be encouraged to develop a positive construction of these young people and a greater sense of future orientation on their behalf.

Careership

The study found two types of approach to transition support, and with reference to the tripartite model of *careership*, (Hodkinson et al 1996) potential improvements can be identified. On the one hand, the study produced ideas about transitions that are gradual, dovetailed and supported by educational personnel, seen as “best practice” by educational psychologists. These support approaches were offered to young people with medical and sensory impairments. On the other hand, the idea of transition being the time to wipe the slate clean, start afresh, with the opportunity for a transformation of identity and support being provided mainly by peers, was favoured by college participants working mainly with young people with social and emotional difficulties. Potential for improvement may be found in synthesising the best elements of these two ideas and relating them to concept of *careership*. Generating activities to aid transition through promoting resilience in young people (Gilligan 2001), and through offering timely advice and support to families (Dolan 2006) may also lead to improvement.

Young people are likely to do better if they can develop transition skills and confidence in themselves. As young people with additional support needs approach transition, teacher and partner professionals should consider how to increase their receptivity to unfamiliar ideas and environments to help prepare them for the next step. Whether in the course of personal and social education classes, through mentoring schemes, in one-to-one sessions with key professionals, or in all of these ways, opportunities are needed to help nurture self-reliance, self-efficacy and self-determination in school-leavers. Non-academic school-leavers would benefit from this type of *careership* curriculum, where the young person's cultural identity is acknowledged and families are included in

transition information and guidance about local opportunities and sources of support. Resilience in young people would be fostered through developing practical transition skills, such as the ability to travel independently and manage personal finance. Support in these areas could help expand the young person's horizons for action. In a similar way, extended work experience placements, tailored to the vocational interests of the individual could give them the positive experiences of the world of work they need. Activities of these sorts could ameliorate cultural disadvantage and would help young people break out of a dependent mindset, address their 'unprepared-ness' and provide the medium for the signals of their value to be relayed to them. At the same time, a *careership* approach to transition support would also help to reshape, in the minds of teachers and professional partners, the construction of young people and confirm them as being subjects in their own lives about to take their various next steps.

Partnerships

In its consideration of interaction between partners from different services, the study has revealed that the ground for partnership working has not been sufficiently prepared. Adoption of the strategies for improvement outlined above would lead to more emphasis being placed on the school's interface with the wider community. This in turn would address one of the barriers, exposed by the study, to positive progressions for young people with additional support needs – that the culture in school was busy, cyclical and school-centred. Activities to bring families, local business, government training programmes, employment services and third sector organizations into closer contact with the school could be extended and enhanced through greater emphasis on partnerships. An approach of this sort, giving young people more opportunity to interact with and within their local community, in preparation of leaving the shelter of school, would develop a stronger understanding of opportunities for young people nearby. On-going closer contact between school and local post-school services and providers would weave a web of support around the school. Investment in the school's social capital, through creating links and bonds to local organizations, and through more direct connection with families could ameliorate the harsher effects of the local economic and employment difficulties.

The prevalent attitude in participants towards *extending their duties* to include transition support was that this was impractical in the circumstances. Finding time to undertake

partnership activities was seen by professional participants as a major obstacle to supporting post-school progressions. Detailing *partnership working* as a component in the remits of guidance, support and senior teachers, and indeed other service providers, would ensure some possibility of addressing this obstacle. If implemented, school guidance and support teachers could lead on making a concerted effort, with local college, training providers, careers service, families and family support services, to create a local post-school network, not as an *extension to their duties*, but as a main part of their work remit. Within this network, face-to-face meetings between professionals could contribute to a robust system to address local youth employment and training difficulties. A two-way exchange of information on post-school activities and on local youth's value and training needs would support the regular review and updating of the *careership* curriculum in school.

The conclusion to this thesis has discussed difficulties and set out areas for improvement in support for post-school transitions of young people with additional support needs. It has done so through offering explanation of the factors, particularly within the professional environment, affecting transition. Some of the negative effects of school culture have contributed to torpidity and lack of change for improvement. Some of the professionals' constructions of young people with low academic attainment have tended to prevent individual support strategies being implemented. The school curriculum has not sufficiently addressed the *careership* needs of young people as they approach transition. This has been due to gaps in partnership working and to the academic focus of the school. However fraught with difficulty an attempt to link the school more productively into its local community is nevertheless a first step on the road to improvement. The barriers to effective transition support for young people with additional support needs will be reduced when greater attention is given to the constraints within the professional environment of the school community.

It is true to say that this study has not set out to discover success stories and has concentrated more on teasing out the issues and problems it has discovered. There are cases however where post-school transition goes reasonably well for young people with additional support needs. To digress briefly, one young man on my case-load, with severe dyslexia and pronounced behavioural support needs, left school at the same time as the participants in this study. He had no progression plans, (when his place on a green-keeping apprenticeship was withdrawn), and no prospects. Through family

connections he found work in the construction industry, but being without skills he was in low paid casual work. However, Polish workers on site took to him and took him under their collective wing. He became useful as a mediator for them and latterly as a translator. He managed this because he was unassuming, willing and had time to understand their broken English. By being useful in this way, he secured his job, for a time, in construction work. I include this anecdote to show that professionally unsupported transitions can be successful but may depend on personal agency, family help and good fortune. However, to return to the main point, the purpose in this conclusion is to draw together themes from the analysis and recommend key ideas and practices that could helpfully be considered by professionals seeking to improve post-school transitions for young people with additional support needs.

Ward and Thomson (1997) found that categorisation of need created difficulties because they were not uniformly applied and they went on to develop three new categories of their own. This study has found that attempting to work with similar categories was unproductive due to contention amongst participants about this process. Benjamin's (2002) concept of intellectual subordination has proved illuminating and potentially of practical benefit. This study confirms Ward and Thomson's concerns that young people whose additional support needs are not recorded in coordinated support plans are likely to fare badly as they leave school. This study has contributed to knowledge in this area by investigating, illuminating and analysing the professional terrain on which transitions take place and it is offered as a contribution towards improvement in this sphere.

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